University of Alberta

Cultural Politics and the English-Canadian Small Press Movement: Three Case Studies

by

Doris Karen Wolf

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Although materialist-oriented literary theories have grown in popularity in Canada in recent years, heightening our awareness of the role publishers play in shaping the books we read and critique, very few critics have explored contemporary English-Canadian publishing in any detailed way. This dissertation redresses this critical inattention by exploring an important segment of contemporary industry, the small press movement. Using Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of cultural which emphasizes thorough examinations of the particular case, I study the histories of three small presses tied to three different literary movements to have gained wider public and critical acceptance in the past several decades: Chapter One looks at Coach House Press which was established in Toronto in 1965 as an avant-garde press; Chapter Two at NeWest Press founded in Edmonton in 1977 as a regionalist press; and Chapter Three at gynergy books, a lesbian feminist press, created in Charlottetown in 1987 as part of, but a distinct enterprise from, Ragweed Press. Each case study is organized chronologically in order to emphasize how changes in administration and financial and material resources have affected the presses' mandates.

While publishing records (in public repositories or private hands) constitute my primary research materials, to fill in the histories of Coach House, NeWest, and gynergy, I have interviewed key members of the presses and referred to articles (trade, scholarly, and newspaper) on their activities. A number of similarities emerge among the small presses under study here. These presses have responded to the same national politics and policies on book publishing and have shared problems of visibility and distribution. Yet each press works out of a unique location, from a particular sense of opposition to the mainstream,

with varying resources, and under dissimilar editorial and management structures. These differences mean that Coach House, NeWest, and gynergy have aged in unique ways, and it is this difference of experience which this dissertation emphasizes.

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INTRODUCTION

Interviewed in 1973 for a special issue of *Canadian Literature*, Edmonton publisher Mel Hurtig offered this atypically cautious, but nonetheless pointed, critique of literary critics and criticism:

> The most interesting thing about book publishing and the 'intellectual community' that I've come across is the failure of most academics and book reviewers and book columnists and editorial writers to understand the role of the publisher. Particularly what I'm thinking about is the way in which a good publisher with a good editorial staff helps the author. And further I find the lack of understanding about how the publisher *originates* books (marries an idea to a writer) is quite astonishing. . . . The image of the publisher sitting back and waiting for manuscripts to cross his desk is prevalent and grossly distorted in most cases. (64)

In the 26 years since Hurtig's remarks, Canadian literary criticism has changed dramatically and hardly at all. It has become commonplace for critics to acknowledge that publishers, far from being book manufacturers or midwives of culture, are literary creators in their own right. The growing popularity of a number of literary theories, from sociologies of culture and histories of the book to feminist and cultural materialisms and new historicisms, has at once engendered and politicized this more active, and accurate, image of the publisher. Sharing at minimum an insistence that the historical conditions of textual production *matter* to critical interpretation, these theories have invested in the publisher's role an explanatory power for the cultural authority, or lack thereof, of texts, authors, and literary movements as well as a transformative power for existing structures of domination and subordination. Although today the stakes of investigations into publishing are proclaimed with passionate regularity, and references to the publisher as a conferrer of literary meaning and value now carry significant cachet in critical circles, they have typically remained just this -- impassioned proclamations and passing references. Very few studies have appeared to provide details on how publishers enact their roles as creators of writing. In this sense, literary criticism has changed very little: while most of us would no longer support the "grossly distorted" image of a passive publisher, we still understand too little about what publishers do, and thus how they influence what books we read and how we read them.

This study seeks to redress critical inattention to Canadian publishing for one segment of the contemporary industry, the English-language small press. Work on the small press movement is timely given its impact on writing and critical reception in recent decades. If a series such as the New Canadian Library "influenced a generation of students, and helped to define which texts would become the subject of serious critical inquiry during the 1960s and 1970s" (Lecker, *Making It Real* 155), small presses have produced a significant portion of the texts to keep students and critics busy since. The decline in government commitment to the publishing industry in the past few years makes

their study even more crucial. After more than two decades of unprecedented though uneven support, government cutbacks threaten the existence of many small presses or, at the very least, the nature of their cultural interventions on which they claimed and built their authority as valued producers of valuable texts. The chapters which follow examine how individual presses have acquired, edited, promoted, and distributed their books over the highs and lows of industry. More than what they do, however, this study explores *why* they do what they do. Part of the answer, but only part, lies in the individuals who work at and run these presses and who set out to accomplish specific goals on behalf of specific communities of writers and readers. Rather than assume that these individuals can mould their presses in the directions they wish, an assumption which has informed critical approaches to the small press, I consider the material conditions which have shaped, enabled, and limited their goals.

Studies of the Publisher's Role: Problems and Possibilities

Two main difficulties have hindered critical investigation of the contemporary English-language small press movement and publishing industry. First, as critics would emphasize in one of the first attempts to bring the production of Canadian literature into literary studies, *questions of funding, publishing and distribution/questions d'édition et de diffusion* (1989),[1] has been a lack of information. In his historical overview of the trade in this volume, "Writers and Publishing in English-Canada," Frank Davey lamented the scantiness of empirical study of twentieth-century publishing and the surprising want of detail on author-publisher relationships as well as publishing and marketing practices in the biographies and autobiographies of twentieth-century publishers and authors. Having drawn on the influential work of H. Pearson Gundy and George L. Parker for his remarks on the nineteenth-century trade, Davey felt far less assured about his commentaries on the recent industry, warning his audience to regard them as "prospective rather than propositional" (19). While the beginnings of book publishing have typically claimed the attention of scholars, information on the contemporary trade has not been entirely absent. Francess Halpenny in her paper in *questions*, "Scholarly Publishing in Canada," outlined several possible sources including trade journals such as *Quill & Quire* which have long been reporting on the ups and downs of the industry and the numerous reports, positions

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[1] *questions of funding, publishing and distribution/questions d'édition et de diffusion* are the proceedings of the second conference of the History of the Literary Institution in Canada project, organized by the University of Alberta's Research Institute for Comparative Literature and held in Edmonton in 1987. Influenced by the polysystems theory of Itamar Even-Zohar, the Research Institute planned ten conferences to build a basis for the systemic and systematic study of Canadian literature and ultimately for the writing of a broad history of the literary institution in Canada (Dimić 555). Its first conference examined reviewing practices while subsequent ones explored topics such as feminist and ethnic writing and publication.

papers, and background documents on the industry generated by the Association of Canadian Publishers and various levels of government.[2] But in her call for "histories and analyses, long or short, of individual publishing houses and of players in them (directors, editors, promotion planners, designers), of authors they have presented and the lists they have developed" (115), she equally highlighted the limitations of these news items and documents. While offering glimpses of the conditions of the trade, they reveal little about how these conditions have played themselves out in the day-to-day practices of publishers.

In recent years, a new fund of research materials has become available to enable a closer look at the inside of publishing houses. Longer involved in collecting writers' papers, libraries have begun to acknowledge the important contributions of publishers to Canadian literary history by bringing their records out of storage rooms, basements, and attics and into their special collections departments. Reflecting the myriad tasks of publishers, these records include author correspondence, minutes of editorial board meetings, as well as production, marketing, and financial files. Three institutions have been especially active in this area: McMaster University which has focused on larger houses such as McClelland & Stewart and Macmillan of Canada; the National Library of Canada which currently houses the papers of ten Ontario and British Columbia small presses, including Anansi, Coach House, and Oolichan; and the University of Manitoba which has acquired the papers of four prairie presses, Thistledown, NeWest, Turnstone, and Coteau. As this outline suggests, most publishers' records remain in-house where they are threatened by poor storage conditions and with disposal, and where researchers have a difficult time gaining access to them. Primarily for reasons of confidentiality, but complicated, especially in the case of small presses, by pressures of time and space, publishers have been extremely reluctant to open their records to researchers. Since its founding in 1987, the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing at Simon Fraser University has played an instrumental role in encouraging publishers to preserve their papers and see scholarly use of these materials as a legitimate and necessary undertaking.[3]

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[2] The ACP has commissioned, for instance, Paul Audley's *A Report on English-Language Book Publishing in Canada* (1974); *Agencies: The Framework Papers* (1977); *Modes of Publishing* (1978); Patricia Aldana's *Canadian Publishing: An Industrial Strategy for its Preservation in the Eighties*(1980); James Lorimer's *Book Reading in Canada: The Audience, the Marketplace, and the Distribution System for Trade Books in English Canada* (1983). Government-generated documents include ones which focus on publishing such as Ernst & Ernst's *The Book Publishing and Manufacturing Industry in Canada: A Statistical and Economic Report* (1970) and the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing's *Background Papers* (1972) and final report, *Canadian Publishers and Publishing* (1973); as well as ones which encompass all the cultural industries such as Applebaum-Hébert's *Summary of Briefs and Hearings* (1981) and *Report* (1982).

[3] The Centre has laid the foundation for archival research in other ways as well: its Canadian Publishers' Records Database contains detailed descriptions of the archival collections of English-language book publishers established prior to 1995.

Through publications such as Laura Coles' *Archival Gold: Managing & Preserving Publishers' Records* (1989), the Centre has offered publishers practical advice on building record preservation into their daily operations and has stressed the value of their records for a wide range of research interests. While in-house storage is no replacement for a proper archival repository, publishers have begun at least on occasion, as my own experience attests, to open their records to outsiders.[4]

Although still too rarely, critics have begun to make use of archival materials.[5] While his *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value* (1991) is a notable instance of the tendency to evoke but not take up how publishers influence writing and reception in Canada,[6] Robert Lecker turns in *Making It Real* (1995) to an examination of the market conditions of one milestone in contemporary canonical activity, McClelland & Stewart's New Canadian Library series. Using the M&S papers at McMaster, in particular, the

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[4] Sibyl Frei, co-owner of Ragweed Press/gynergy books, the one press in this study whose records remain in-house, drew my attention to Laura Coles' book which she used to organize the press' archives.

[5] The Bibliographical Society of Canada's History of the Book in Canada project holds promise for more studies of this kind. Its preliminary papers on Ontario book publishing (1997) suggest the use of archival materials. Although a volume on twentieth-century print culture is planned, it remains unclear if it will extend beyond 1970. See www.library.utoronto.ca/hbic.

[6] In his introduction to *Canadian Canons*, Robert Lecker notes that while "the ideal examination of any canon would include an analysis of market forces . . . this book cannot fully encompass this ideal [because] space remains a function of cost" (4). His list of the "market forces" which need attention, but which his book cannot address, includes the publishing industry, as well as government subsidies, curriculum development, reviewing practices, and the bookselling industry. Lecker has been taken to task for this erasure by critics interested in the material conditions of production (see, for example, Jennifer Andrews' "A Preliminary History: The House of Anansi Press"). Not surprisingly, the most biting critique has come from Frank Davey who suggests that Lecker "raised the issue of 'institution' without going on to look into actual institutions" because of his humanist, liberationist leanings and deep involvement in the mainstream institutional process through ECW Press (*Canadian Literary Power* 61). This critique forms part of the well-known debate between Lecker and Davey over the formation of the contemporary Canadian canon, a debate which began in the spring 1990 issue of *Critical Inquiry* and has (potentially) concluded in Lecker's *Making It Real* (chapter 2) and Davey's *Canadian Literary Power* (chapter 2). Their disagreement revolves around opposing conceptions of the canon: for Lecker, the Canadian canon is a monolithic structure dominated by realist writing; for Davey, it is a plural network of competing canons (a product of his own involvement in, for instance, *Open Letter* and Coach House Press).

correspondence between series' editor Malcolm Ross and publisher Jack McClelland, Lecker centres his analysis of the origins and early development of the series on two questions: "How much did Ross's aesthetic preferences influence the selection of titles to be included in the series?" and "How much of what came to be called a collection of Canadian classics was produced by a business decision that determined which texts would be made available to teachers, students, and the public?" (157). Citing details such as McClelland's concern that copyright, royalties, production costs, and college sales be considered in the NCL selection process, he offers clear answers: Ross had so little impact on the series that "even if we could determine the principles of selection that prompted [him] to choose certain texts over others, it wouldn't really matter"; instead, his "genuinely noble intentions in conceiving the series were soon overrun by McClelland's businesslike ability to capitalize on the commercial benefits inherent in the idea of promoting a national literature at the mass-market level" (164, 159). The series which came to form one imagined tradition of Canadian writing was, Lecker concludes, little more than a marketing scheme.

A very different, much more positive tone emerges in the archival-based work done on the opposite end of publishing industry, the small press. In "Vain Dream to Mainstream: The Growth of Red Deer College Press" (1995), Paul G. Boultbee traces the development of Red Deer College Press from an avant-garde poetry press for Alberta poets under the editorship of Gary Botting to a more eclectic, nationalist venture directed by Dennis Johnson.[7] Although Boultbee describes Red Deer College Press as "an example of many of the small literary presses which were established across Canada in the 1970s" (64, ftn. 1), his interest in the relationship between the press and Red Deer College's Board of Governors results in an emphasis on what was *atypical* about the press: its direct affiliation with an educational institution from which it has received grants, an annual line of credit, and workload release for its editor and secretary almost from its inception. In his reading, even while the Board expressed very early a distinct lack of interest in the modern poetry arm of the press and has insisted at crucial moments on greater financial accountability and clearer direction, it has been an enabling presence: it has "challenged the Press and its members and propelled the Press forward" (57, 61). Although the details differ, Jennifer Andrews' "A Preliminary History: The House of Anansi Press" (1998) presents a similar trajectory for the Toronto small press which began in David Godfrey's basement for the publication of young writers and is now a publishing arm of Stoddart.[8] Noting how the press today spends a considerable amount of its resources repackaging its acclaimed backlist (including introductions by high-profile individuals to contextualize the

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[7] Boultbee cites two primary sources for his work on Red Deer College Press: the press' archives, currently located at the press' offices, and articles in the *Red Deer Advocate* (65, ftn. 1).

[8] Andrews relies on materials available in Toronto, namely the Dennis Lee Papers at the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Library, which include letters, memos, budgets, and reports on Anansi's early years.

work and its impact on Canadian culture) and how it has transformed its Spiderline series, which originally published first-time fiction authors, into one which emphasizes neither first-time writers nor fiction, Andrews nonetheless takes at face value Jack Stoddart's assurance that his purchase of Anansi "was not 'designed to turn a profit' but rather to demonstrate a 'commitment to publishing certain types of material that should be published'" (64). In spite of its acquisition by a company many times its size, Anansi has been able to "grow in new directions and pick up lost threads (as in the case of Spiderline)."

While the studies above contribute in valuable ways to a growing area of study, they nevertheless highlight the second difficulty with investigations of contemporary publishers and the publishing industry: the degree to which the accepted clichés of the industry inform the selection and interpretation of the very materials which would seem to offer the possibility of a more nuanced understanding of the publisher's role. Although Lecker insists that his discovery of the New Canadian Library's marketing aims should come as a shock, in fact, it comes as little surprise. Large established publishing houses, so received wisdom has it, are inherently inattentive to the best or newest in writing, and are thus inherently bad, because of their profit-oriented approach to publishing. Following this cliché, Lecker casts Jack McClelland and his publishing house as one-dimensional mercenaries who (in his two favourite terms) "exploited" and "manipulated" not just Ross but every player connected to the NCL: the readers to whom they sold the idea of a Canadian "classic" even while they had little respect for Canadian writing; the authors who provided the fodder for the series but whom they saw as just that, fodder-producers; and the academics who made the series a financial success but for whom McClelland in particular held a high degree of contempt. In insisting on this image of the bad, large publisher, Lecker fails to consider a number of details, for example, how the guidelines for selecting NCL books included the publication of "loss leaders" to carry texts which would "preserve the purpose of the Series" (162). While attention to this issue (especially since this is a strategy commonly employed by small presses) might not fundamentally undermine the notion of McClelland as a competent businessman or heedful of the bottom-line, it would at the very least open the possibility that Malcolm Ross had some room in getting books he wanted into the series.

Opposing the large publisher is the good small press who in refusing profit motive and in publishing primarily on behalf of an aesthetic or ideological cause emerges as an heroic figure. From the "stubbornness" of Red Deer College Press' past and present editors (61) to the artful manoeuvring of a press "[n]amed after a trickster spider-god in African myths" (65), it is this image which Boultbee's and Andrews' articles support. If in reproducing the cliché of the bad large publisher, Lecker simplistically reduces every decision made by McClelland & Stewart to rational economics, the acceptance of the inherent goodness of the small press results in an opposite problematic: the erasure of the impact of the material conditions to which their discussions begin to draw attention. Thus Boultbee can conclude that Red Deer College Press remains as committed as ever to "culturally significant" books (61) and Andrews that Anansi has been able "to retain the spirit of its founders" (65). A more useful approach would attend to the ways in which

the notions of cultural significance and founding spirit have changed at these presses, an approach occluded by the narrative of heroic individualism on which these articles insist.

The Emergence of the Publishing Clichés: A New Ethos of Support for the Small Press

To some degree, the long-standing connection between Canadian culture and nation-building and the equally long-standing hardships of publishing in a country with small markets, a large distribution territory, and vast foreign competition have helped to foster an heroic picture of *any* producer willing to take on the almost insurmountable odds of producing Canadian writing. In 1885, author William Kirby watched the detrimental effects of American piracy and cheap reprints on the one side and self-serving British copyright laws on the other and warned that "Canadian book publishing has become almost a lost industry among us, and with it Canadian authorship fails likewise, for authorship without publishers is like the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (qtd. in Gundy 22). Kirby no doubt had in mind the enterprizing printer-publisher John Lovell, who published a number of poetry books and novels by Canadian authors, including his own *The Golden Dog* in 1877, but was also heavily involved in reprinting British books in New York State for importation and sale in Canada. In their 1951 *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences*, the Massey-Léveque commissioners similarly appealed to "the immense importance of the Canadian publisher in the development of Canada letters" (228). Committed to building national cultural institutions in central Canada, they interviewed and quoted a representative of the influential Canadian Book Publishers Council, an organization dominated by large foreign-owned firms, who romantically proclaimed that the book publisher was in essence "the architect of the mind." Book publishers, the commissioners concluded, were well aware of "the great responsibility which is theirs" and therefore deserving of government support.

But at the beginning of the 1970s, a crisis in the mainstream industry provoked a sharp awareness of the kinds of publishers available to uphold this responsibility. The sales of Ryerson and Gage, two of Canada's oldest publishing houses, to American companies, along with the impending sale of McClelland & Stewart, the leading publisher of English Canadian trade titles, at once shocked the Canadian public and policy makers out of their post-Massey Commission complacency that arts and culture were finally on track in Canada and made them sceptical of their large established publishers' ability to uphold their end of the cultural bargain. With news of the crisis appearing in the mainstream media, Canadians learned about the real state of affairs of the industry. "A take-over of Canadian publishing houses by conglomerates from abroad?" Robert Weaver reflected in the August 1970 issue of *Maclean's*, just after Ryerson Press made one last ditch effort to stay afloat. "Curiously, there aren't that many Canadian publishers who could be taken over even if outside interests were considering them" (64). Weaver informed his readers of the large degree of foreign ownership of the trade and the tradition of agency publishing which tied even Canadian-owned enterprises rather too closely to British and American

concerns.[9] Paranoid that the Vietnam War-instigated civil unrest in the United States could undermine the peace and good government of their country, Canadians discovered they cared about the U.S. takeover of the industry. It was, their national magazine told them, invoking the rhetoric of the Massey Commission, a matter of national security. The same August issue that included Weaver's article on the imminent collapse of the industry contained a special Canada Report which warned, "Our neighbor's house is on fire. If we're not careful, we'll get burned" ("How To" 3). To keep the violent dissent in America "from spilling anarchically over the border," *Maclean's* turned to the "best minds in Canada" for advice. The general solution was, of course, for Canadians "to set about building 'something that is clearly their own'" (1).

If mainstream publishers' role as nation-builders seemed compromised, there was a group of Canadian publishers ready in the wings to take over from them -- the small presses which had emerged en mass in the 1960s.[10] While a small group of commentators had heralded their appearance, the public had very little knowledge of or interest in their existence. Now, neither owned by foreign firms nor tied to foreign interests through agency relationships, they represented the most Canadian of all the Canadian-owned producers and thus the potential saviours of Canadian writing. Two special issues of *Canadian Literature* on the publishing industry, the first published in 1967 and the second

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[9] In agency publishing, a Canadian-owned publisher acts as the exclusive agent for a foreign house, both importing and distributing its titles. While these relationships have been justified on the grounds that the revenue generated by selling foreign titles can be used to support indigenous publishing, in reality, they rarely had these results. As Rowland Lorimer notes, "Although ownership [of branch plants and agency publishers] was clearly different, if publishing output is a valid measure, as surely in the end it must be, the constraints acting on [agency publishers] and the market opportunities to which they could respond were substantially the same" (n. pag.). These constraints were enacted through an implicit threat that a Canadian publisher would not have its agency contract renewed if it pursued too actively its own publishing programme. As Lorimer sums up, "No foreign publisher has an interest in providing the cash flow necessary to run a competitive publishing venture."

[10] While the phenomenal growth of the small press movement in the 1960s is a familiar story, Grace Tratt's *The Check List of Canadian Small Press: English Language* (1974) offers some statistical grounds for just how remarkable that growth was: while just over a dozen small presses had managed to make their appearance in the 1940s and 50s, notably First Statement Press, Contact Press, and Fiddlehead Poetry Books, approximately one hundred presses emerged in the next decade. Although they remain an index of the vitality of the small press revolution, many of these ventures published only a few titles before they fizzled out. Others survived the decade to become a well-known part of Canadian literary history. Anansi, Beaver Kosmos, blewointment, Coach House, Delta, Ganglia, New Press, Oberon, and Talonbooks stand out as the most successful of the new wave of small publishers.

in 1973, reveal the dramatic change in perception toward the small press: the first issue, "Publishing in Canada," contains only one article on the small press movement while the second, "Publish Canadian," includes only one on large publishers. Commenting on the shift in focus, journal editor George Woodcock noted that while in 1967 a house such as McClelland & Stewart "concentrated the hopes of most people who were concerned for the future of writing in Canada," by 1973 small presses symbolized that promise, having "shifted the whole balance of publication in this country" and "counterbalanced . . . the conversion of important native Canadian houses into branch plants of American publishing corporations" ("Publishing Present" 4-5).

New government policy to arise out of the crisis in the mainstream industry reflected this shift in attitude. Although the Massey Commission had ensured that publishers were placed on the cultural agenda of the state -- not, as Woodcock has noted, a predestined outcome since their role as cultural producers is not as clearly defined as that of art galleries, theatres, ballet companies, or orchestras (*Strange Bedfellows* 80) -- before 1970, the Canada Council, established in 1956 out of the commission's recommendations, gave very little of its limited funds to them.[11] Small press grants were particularly small and unreliable, and their growth in the 60s was attributable to other factors such as the coming of age of the baby boom generation and developments in printing methods, primarily offset and mimeograph, which made book production faster and cheaper. On the recommendations of the Ernst and Ernst report on publishing (1970) and the Ontario Royal Commission's findings (1970-73), the federal and Ontario governments, respectively, began to put more money into the industry. While both levels of government concerned themselves with the fate of mainstream publishers (most immediately, for instance, the Ontario government stepped in to save McClelland & Stewart with a $961,000 long-term, low-interest loan [Broten, *Paper Phoenix* 29]), they also accommodated the concerns of the small presses. Implemented in 1972, the Canada Council's block grant program was an especially important new form of assistance for small presses notoriously short on operating capital. Based on the overall cultural program of a publishing house rather than individual titles and distributed in a lump sum, it offered cash-strapped presses some measure of stability.

Reflecting on the events of the 1970s, James Lorimer would describe the people involved in small press production as "too modest" to claim for themselves the government measures which would ensure their vitality and activity. Writing in 1980 just after the industry had gone through one of its worst sales seasons in years and the Secretary of State had announced that its Canadian Book Publishing Development Program would no longer award funds on numbers of culturally significant titles in print, regardless of market potential, but use sales as its main criteria, Lorimer no doubt felt they needed an authoritative commentator to remind the government of its commitments. In reality, however, the small presses emerged in the early 70s as a highly political group

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[11] In 1970-71, for example, the National Ballet and Royal Winnipeg Ballet together received more than the entire writing budget, which included grants to publishers and individual writers (Woodcock *Strange Bedfellows*, 59).

which used the change in public ethos as leverage to make their interests heard. In response to the sales of Ryerson and Gage, a number of small houses banded together with several medium-sized publishers to form the Independent Publishers Association (renamed the Association of Canadian Publishers in 1976) which actively lobbied both the federal and Ontario governments as they formulated new policies on book publishing. The ACP would remark in its self-published history in 1978 that, seeing a large number of its concerns reflected in policy developments of 1970-72, "the IPA had a right to self-congratulation on what it had accomplished on behalf of the Canadian publishing industry" (n. pag). These accomplishments included increased funds for translation grants and book purchase programs which distributed books within Canada and abroad, as well as the development of the Canada Council's block grant program.

The early years of the IPA were not quite as rosy as the ACP suggests. Not part of its 1978 history are the tensions which arose within IPA ranks between small presses and medium-sized publishers over recommendations for refinements to the Council's block program. A series of letters written by David Robinson of Talonbooks to Robin Farr of the Canada Council in March and April of 1973 indicate how the small press contingent of the association came to feel that its interests were being supplanted by those of the medium houses.[12] Of particular concern to the small presses was the IPA's suggestion to the Council that it make a minimum annual sales of $20,000 a requirement for eligibility for block grant assistance. Representing the small literary presses on the IPA executive and feeling that the proposal had been railroaded through the executive committee, Robinson was not content to sit back and let events unfold. He sidestepped the IPA and wrote directly to Farr to express his dissatisfaction. "[T]he figure of $20,000," he complained, "has been chosen so that it purposely excludes the small literary presses, who, as most members of the executive know, could not possible have that sales volume at this time" (1). He makes clear the potential ramifications of such a proposal: "the moyen & larger houses will be left free to pollute the market with their volume & their obsolete hit & miss approach to commercial publishing, while the small presses which are "the literary backbone of the country & hope for the future, a future free of commercial consideration, but with a cultural heritage, will be cast aside" (2). The Council would refuse the IPA's recommendation.[13]

Robinson's impassioned and astute rhetoric underscores in more precise ways the qualities for which small presses would be valued and supported throughout the 1970s and 80s. More than just Canadian-owned, they embodied, in their size, the crucial link between cultural significance and non-commercialism which had its origins in the Massey Commission's goal to transform Canada into a politically sovereign state through the civilizing influence, but limited market appeal, of high culture. Cultural policy in this

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[12] Copies of these letters are included in Coach House Press Papers at the National Library, 1st accession, Box 16, David Robinson file.

[13] Though the number has changed several times, entrance to the block program was, and remains, tied to numbers of eligible titles in print.

period would move away from the Commission's aims in some fundamental ways. It would encourage the decentralization of the industry and the rise of what Frank Davey calls the "special-constituency focused" small press defined along regional, gender, ethnic, and racial lines ("Collapse" 87). It would even adopt as early as the late 70s the term "cultural industries," reflecting a desire for culture to become more self-sufficient (Dowler 341). Overall, though, policy retained a commitment to writing which was culturally important but of low commercial viability: the shift to sales and marketing criteria of the Secretary of State's Canadian Book Publishing Development Program (CBPDP) in 1979 was counterbalanced by changes at the Canada Council which simultaneously put greater emphasis on its support of small literary and cultural publishers by cutting entrance to the block program from 15 titles to 12 and significantly reducing its grants to large publishers (McClelland & Stewart's block grant, for example, was cut from $95,000 in 1979 to $24,500 in 1980) ("New Rules" 10); in 1987, the federal government would emphasize that its industrial incentives through the Book Publishing Industry Development Plan, which replaced the CBPDP, were aimed at making large, not small, Canadian-controlled publishers self-financing. "[C]ulturally oriented subsidies are more than ever necessary for smaller, particularly regional, publishers, whose authors include many of the most authentic voices of this country" (*Vital Links* 31).[14]

Public belief in the value of small press production has waned. To be fair, it has waned for the industry as a whole. Unlike the 1970-71 crisis in mainstream publishing, the takeover of Random House Canada and Doubleday Canada by the German media conglomerate Bertelsmann Publishing AG in 1999 drew only a muted reaction from a few cultural nationalists led by Heritage Minister Sheila Copps and ACP president Jack Stoddart. The nature of the protest over foreign-control of the industry has also changed: appeals to the importance of a Canadian-owned industry for Canadian authorship have been replaced with an emphasis on the economic importance of keeping our publishers in Canadian hands. As Val Ross reported in the *Globe & Mail*, in their negotiations with Investment Canada, Copps and the ACP, "pressed for undertakings such as maintaining job levels and job types, and requiring companies to distribute all books through Canadian-based distribution arms." In response to waning importance of culture as *culture*, the literary community has adopted a reactionary position. Occasionally, it has produced intensely romantic portrayals of large producers. Sam Solecki's introduction to *Imagining Canadian Literature: The Selected Letters of Jack McClelland* is a good case in point: Solecki foregrounds that "McClelland published authors (not books)" and describes him as "the real Prime Minister of Canada" who was concerned with "a vision of the nation" and not with "the mundane realpolitik of the state" (xv, xvii). More often, literary critics have fetishized the small non-commercial press. We rally around the closure of Coach House but let the takeover of Random House and Doubleday go virtually

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[14] This dual commitment does not suggest that the state's monetrary commitment to the industrial and cultural sides of publishing was equal: the 1986 federal budget, for example, gave 8.2 million dollars to the BPIDP and 4.8 million to the Canada Council (*Vital Links* 31). Many small publishers qualified for both.

uncommented even though both events signify an erosion of the policies of protectionism and support initiated in the 1970s. Or we enthusiastically investigate the market conditions of the New Canadian Library but hesitate to suggest that our small presses are influenced by similar or related conditions. As John Guillory notes in relation to the canon debate, while contemporary theory has successfully called into question categories of essentialism, identity, and experience, progressive critics have retained these categories for canonical revision, valorizing the texts of minority writers as intrinsically noncanonical (9-10). This division of theory and practice is evident in the current critical approach to small presses. As the primary producers of noncanonical texts, the small press is represented as intrinsically "altruistic," even within analyses which pay heed to material problems of access and distribution.[15]

Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture: The Case Studies

Pierre Bourdieu's work on the field of cultural production offers a particularly fruitful approach to an area of study characterized by celebratory effusions and a resistance to materialist analysis. From his earlier essays in *The Field of Cultural Production* to his more recent *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu has set as his primary goal the demystification of artistic production through a "materialist mode of questioning" (qtd. in Wacquant 41).[16] His main interest lies in the most sacred, fetizhized end of artistic production -- that of small publishers, or restricted producers, who pit commercial success and intrinsic artistic value against each other. Because they disavow commercial goals, they are typically viewed, as Bourdieu notes, and as we have seen holds true for Canadian small press publishers, as "inspired talent-spotters who, guided by their disinterested, unreasoning passion for a work of art, have 'made' the . . . writer, or have helped him make himself, by encouraging him in difficult moments with the faith they had in him, guiding him with their advice and freeing him from material worries" (*Field* 77). Two principles inform Bourdieu's reassessment of these producers: that all proclamations of disinterest, no matter how passionately espoused or sincerely felt, are illusions; and that the value of cultural goods is produced by a complex network of relationships rather than any one individual.

It is through the term "symbolic capital" that Bourdieu brings materialist analysis

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[15] In *Outsider Notes: Feminist Approaches to Nation State Ideology, Writers/Readers and Publishing*, Lynette Hunter uses the term "altruistic" to describe the impact that government funding has had on small press producers (31). Her broad survey of alternative production in Canada focuses on questions of access to literacy for marginalized communities.

[16] This project is also the dominant theme of Bourdieu's work in other areas, for instance, his examination of the academic world in *Homo Academicus* or of cultural consumption in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

back into a universe which defines itself by a refusal of the commercial. Defined as prestige or authority, symbolic capital contains a form of economic rationality both in the strict sense that producers who are successful in accumulating it will eventually reap economic profits from their efforts and in the sense that it is always already a form of capital worth fighting over. The most useful aspect of Bourdieu's work, however, is that it refuses to reduce the study of cultural production to economism. In other words, symbolic capital is just that -- *symbolic*, and thus circulates according to its own laws. Unlike commercial publishers for whom a public prediction that a book will be a bestseller will help ensure its economic success, restricted producers profit by a rationale whereby the less visible the investment the more productive it is symbolically. Thus Bourdieu's theory asks that even while we see disavowal of economic profit as illusory, we take those disavowals seriously in accounting for the production of value of a text or producer: a sociology of art must "take into account everything which helps to constitute the work as such, not least the discourses of direct or disguised celebration which are among the social conditions of production of the work *qua* object of belief" (*Field* 35) .

The small presses comprising this study are tied to three literary movements which have gained wider public and critical acceptance in the past two to three decades: Coach House Press which was established in 1965 as an avant-garde press; NeWest founded in 1977 to represent, as its name suggests, the region of the West; and gynergy books, a lesbian feminist press, created in 1987 as part of, but a distinct enterprise from, Ragweed Press. In tracing the growth of these presses from their origins up to present (or in the case of Coach House up to its closure in 1996), a number of similarities emerge. These presses have responded to the same national politics and policies on book publishing and have shared problems of visibility and distribution. As well, they have all experienced the process of what Bourdieu calls "growing old," which implies a moderating of the denial of the economy as its backlists and overheads grow (*Field* 104). In other words, they have each faced the problem of negotiating a small press ideology from within an increasingly mid-size structure. Yet, Coach House, NeWest, and gynergy are more different than they are the same: they work out of unique locations, from a particular sense of opposition to the mainstream, with varying financial and material resources, and under dissimilar editorial and management structures. These differences mean that they have experienced the ageing process in unique ways, and it is this difference of experience which I foreground in this study.

Publishing records constitute my primary research materials. The National Library maintains the records of Coach House from 1965 up to the closure of the press in 1996, although to date only the first two accessions (1965-75 and 1976-81) are accessible to the public. I have also used the Frank Davey Papers at Simon Fraser University, which include some later Coach House materials.[17] The NeWest archive at the University of Manitoba begins with its inception in 1977 and presently goes up to 1991. Ragweed/gynergy's records are maintained at the press' office in Charlottetown. A fire destroyed much of the press in 1986, and while a substantial body of material preceding that date does exist, it is

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[17] I thank Frank Davey for drawing these materials to my attention.

difficult to know exactly what was lost. Some of the materials remained closed to me, in particular, information relating to the press's current finances and marketing practices. To fill in the histories of Coach House, NeWest, and gynergy, I have interviewed key members of the presses and referred to news articles on their activities. Coach House especially became the subject of numerous national newspaper and magazine articles as its reputation grew. Except for *Quill & Quire*, local papers have been more responsive in reporting the activities of NeWest and gynergy. I use these materials as more than a supplement to available archives, however. Because they articulate what these presses have striven to accomplish and how they have been perceived, they constitute "the discourses of direct and disguised celebration" fundamental to understanding their position in the field -- but not necessarily the realities of their operation.

Although the chapters which follow are ordered chronologically, according to the founding dates of the presses, a rather different principle influenced my arrangement of the material. As Bourdieu notes, "[I]f, in an inquiry into the French intellectual field of the 1950s, you leave out Jean-Paul Sartre, or Princeton University in a study of American academics, your field is destroyed, insofar as these personas or institutions mark a crucial position -- there are positions in a field which command the whole structure" (Qtd. in Wacquant 38). Coach House represents such a commanding position in the Canadian small press field: it was, and arguably continues to be, "the incarnation of disintinction" of restricted production in Canada.[18] It influenced the development of other small presses: for example, Turnstone Press' founder, David Arnason, remarked in 1978 that his press used "Coach House Press as a model" (Daniel 32). While this comment indicates a desire to be something like Coach House, it equally emphasizes how an identification with the small Toronto press helped mark both one's legitimacy as a producer and one's position as a certain kind of producer. Coach House did not just define small press publishing *within* the field; it also represented to the public, as the plethora of articles on the press over the course of its life suggests, what a small press should be. While the general public was not necessarily interested in Coach House's books or in much of its anti-bourgeois politics (it seemed to have an attraction-repulsion relationship to the latter), in a climate where the public accepted its role as patron of arts, which until recently it generally has, Coach House's intensely anti-commerical stance symbolized the idea of small press production. To begin with a history of Canada's "premiere" small press establishes the boundaries of the field.

Chapter One explores the gradual transformation of Coach House from a young avant-garde press which found it easy to disavow commercial goals to a consecretated producer which found it far more difficult to sustain a distance from the economy, and the internal pressures wrought by this change. Within this trajectory, I foreground two issues, both inspired by the "insider" accounts of the press which have appeared since its death in

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[18] In accounting for Bourdieu's insistent reference to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Toril Moi notes, "Sartre was the incarnation of distinction in the French intellectual field" (49).

1996.[19] These articles betray an eagerness, now that the press proper is closed, to tell the "true" story of its development. Although media reports of Coach House's death stressed the continued avant-gardism of the press over the course of its life, these accounts by people close to the press emphasize quite the opposite: that the press in its last years was nothing more than a commercial venture, not merely a shadow of what it had been previously, but a perversion. This sharp demarcation leads to an heightened romantic portrayal of its early years, especially its first decade. Victor Coleman, editor for the press in its first editorial period, is described as an unambitious hero (Rosenburg 13); his departure as a happy and mutual decision made possible because Coach House was "less a business than an elastic arts community" (Dragland 78). The archives suggest a rather different portrayal of Coleman and his departure (which had all the markings of an attempted corporatist takeover). By offering these details, I do not deny that the press changed significantly over the course of its life, but that, following Bourdieu, there is no such thing as a disinterested producer, not even Coach House under Coleman.

If the disjuncture between the representations of Coach House and the archival materials has intrigued me, what has intrigued me even more is the tone of condescension adopted by many of those "in the know" toward outsiders for buying into the avant-gardism of Coach House's last years. Norman Ravvin, for example, who had worked at the press one summer in the second half of the 1980s, remarked in 1997 that the "lack of care" exhibited by the literary community in decrying the death of the avant-garde small press "makes a mockery of a discussion that's meant to hold the Press up as a symbol of the sort of institution that deserves government support" (204-05). Ravvin's comment, however, ignores the *care* the press took over the course of its life to sell itself as avant-garde. In 1988, at the height of tensions over how commercial the press should become, members divided on the subject managed to rally together to present a coherent image of the press to Dan Richler for an article which appeared in *Toronto Life*'s Fashion section. bp Nichol's "We don't give a shit about the market. The whole notion of hype in publishing is wrong" (66) is reminicent of self-representations of the press in its earliest years. If outsiders have lamented the death of Coach House as the passing of an avant-garde press, this lamentation highlights the success of the press in projecting a youthful avant-garde image through, as I outline in my chapter, a variety of conscious strategies.

While Coach House defined its mandate according to a transnational and provincial avant-gardism, its activities were tied closely to its home-base, Toronto, and to a lesser degree, Vancouver. As Doug Barbour, long-time member and current president of NeWest Press, has remarked, very few writers from the prairies "ever made it onto the Coach House list" (20). NeWest was formed in response to a sense of alienation, of being dismissed as second-rate by the centre, and a sense of pride in its own locale. Chapter Two explores how NeWest's success as a regionalist press in one of the most prosperous regions of the country has configured its sense of its literary politics. Its close ties to the university have played a significant role in this configuration. In the case of NeWest, we

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[19] Most of these articles appear in *Open Letter*'s special issue on Coach House (Spring 1997).

see how revisions to regionalist theory within the university have informed the press' lists. Its ties to the university have also shaped its relationship to the anti-commercial ideology: while it has valued the links between non-commercialism and cultural value, it has not experienced the same internal disagreements over issues of producing a more self-sufficient list, economically speaking, and related issues such as professionalism. The middle press in this study, it represents the middle position in terms of fetishizing economic disavowal.

Of the three presses under study here, gynergy holds the least symbolic capital. It has struggled against a double sense of isolation: it is the only feminist press in Canada which lies outside the major centres of Toronto and Vancouver; and unlike NeWest which is tied to one of the most successful regionalist movements in Canada, gynergy exists in the poorest region, materially and symbolically. The realities of its location mean that is has been unable to just produce what it wants regardless of market potential. As Bourdieu notes, it takes money to exist in the restricted field of production. Coach House was the richest of the three presses in this study not only because it existed in Ontario, the province with the most grant money and largest markets, but also because of its printing operation. Next to Ontario, Alberta, NeWest's home, has had the best grant support system. In contrast, Prince Edward Island has offered very little support to its publishers. Yet, gynergy sees itself as existing solidly within the restricted field of production due to its well-defined politics and the limited market appeal of its books.

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1

COACH HOUSE PRESS: NEGOTIATING THE AVANT-GARDE

Physically, the Coach House Press is an idea that always gets bogged down in its own inept economics; for to think in terms of economics in the production of original works is to put the business where the art once was. It is not, for us, an industry; do not mistake the machinery for instruments of death. It is tenuous, half-faltering; a group of men and women who somehow come together to put forth images to a few others. The sharing of some small and large occasions with a few hundred friends; friends unknown, mostly, but friends in their responses. (20)

--Victor Coleman, "Technical Difficulties," 1969

Known for its beautiful, inscrutable publishing, Coach House has not only produced some of the worst books in the country, it has made them look nice. It has also published books of consequence: its bestseller was Michael Ondaatje's *Rat Jelly*. Coach House published Wyndham Lewis's *Mrs. Duke's Million* for the first time, Matt Cohen's *Peach Melba*, *Intervals* by Stuart Mackinnon, and other works, by both deserving and known authors that might not have appeared through more conventional companies. Members are quick to point out three Governor General's award winners who either started with, or returned to Coach House: bp Nicol [sic], Michael Ondaatje and Joe Rosenblatt. But to discuss publishing strategy with the Coach House group is to discover that there is nothing really calculated in its publishing program. (14)

--Katherine Govier, "Coach House and Women's Press," 1979

Since its founding in 1965, Coach House Press has acquired a reputation as one of Canada's major publishers of fiction, poetry, non-fiction, works-in-translation, and most recently, drama. Today, Coach House sits fairly comfortably somewhere between the mainstream and the fringe of contemporary Canadian letters . . . (32)

--Lorna Knight, "Impressions of Coach House Press," 1991

Spaced almost exactly ten years apart, the three epigraphs to this chapter reveal how the reputation of Coach House Press and its books changed dramatically over the three decades of its operation. While we might take issue with Katherine Govier for equating the press's "books of consequence" almost exclusively with its bestsellers and Governor General's award winners or, having so recently witnessed the events which transpired only five years after her remark, smile wryly at Lorna Knight for calling even "fairly" comfortable what proved to be the press's very awkward position between the mainstream and fringe of Canadian letters, their comments emphasize just how much Coach House grew away from the days of contented self-promotion and limited literary notice under the editorship of Victor Coleman to become part of the literary establishment. What these epigraphs equally evoke is the charismatic appeal of Coach House almost from the moment it was founded in 1965, first for a small group of people, largely artists and writers, who soon came to think of the press as their home, but increasingly for a wider reading public who knew the press by reputation and its books only. Even though the press would never have attracted this larger audience to the degree that it did without its mainstream ties, its charisma for both groups was constituted in the same direction -- in its fringe position, that is, its avant-gardism. To be avant-garde, Bourdieu writes, means seeking "discontinuity, rupture, difference, revolution"; it means being at once different from and ahead of other cultural producers

in the field, especially the most consecrated of them (*Field* 106). No matter how much Coach House lost its revolutionary spirit and turned into a consecrated producer, mainstream and non-mainstream media alike continued to fetishize it as a model small press through avant-garde and not mainstream discourses. Non-commercial, original, experimental, risky, revolutionary, strange, weird, odd, perverse, anachronistic -- these words pervade accounts of Coach House's activities and cultural significance throughout its life and on its death in 1996.

Initially, Coach House was avant-garde in more than just its literary aesthetics. Tied to the 1960s counter-culture in Toronto, its avant-gardism permeated the atmosphere of the press. As David McKnight describes, "Subversion was integral to the philosophy of the Press, and the accoutrements of drugs and rock-and-roll encouraged experiment, social commentary and satire; working at the Press was as much about lifestyle and social values as it was about producing books" (37). In the merry battle spirit of avant-garde movements everywhere -- "*épatez la bourgeoisie*, shock the middle class" (Wolfe 14) -- Coach House sought to subvert the staid tastes and attitudes of middle-class Canadians by shocking. Thus, it did not merely renounce public opinion and profit motive but found ways, for instance Coleman's article in *Artscanada* from which the opening epigraph is taken, to let the public *know* that they and their buying power did not matter. Similarly, it did not just embrace the accoutrements of drugs but included the colophon "Printed in Canada on Canadian Paper by mindless acid freaKs" in some of its early titles and became the official printer of Rochdale College, Toronto's short-lived experiment in liberal post-secondary education, which was infamous both for harbouring American draft dodgers and for embracing the drug culture of the 60s. Like Rochdale, Coach House was unrespectable -- and proud of it. Also, like Rochdale, the press valued that anti-materialistic living arrangement stigmatized and feared by the mainstream, the hippie commune. Not only did many members of Coach House live in the Rochdale apartments (McKnight 37), but the press itself maintained an open-door policy, inviting like-minded artists to share in its resources and feel free to simply hang out there any time of night or day. As George Bowering describes in "Random Access Coach House," in the old days, as an old pal to the press and a Coach House author, he could drop by unexpectedly, always to an enthusiastic reception, wander about visiting, see what was new, and pick up, gratis, whatever recent publications he might want to take home with him to British Columbia. "How I miss those times," Bowering laments in that article, written in 1991 after the "suits" seemed a permanent feature of the press and its "narcorevolutionary loveheads" only part of the past (101).

Coach House's approach to book production also lay behind its communal spirit. The press's proprietor, Stan Bevington, first opened Coach House in the fall of 1964 as a small-job commercial print shop, and while this commercial work enabled him to purchase much needed equipment and experiment with various printing techniques, it was not until March of the next year that he discovered a far more satisfying outlet for his growing expertise as a printer. Working closely with poet Wayne Clifford and illustrator Dennis Reid, Bevington not only designed and printed what would be Coach House Press's inaugural book, *Man in a Window*, but launched the collaborative model

of book production that would remain with the press, largely unchanged, until the late 1980s. In a draft funding proposal in 1966, Bevington wrote of his experience with *Man in a Window*:

> [T]his possibility of working in direct creative response to both the author and the medium resulted in a frustrated printer. The limitations of commercial work are such that this necessary conjunction seldom takes place.
>
> This became particularly apparent during a commission to design for a Canadian Publisher. All effort was made to achieve a fusion of form and content, but due to the limitations of commercial production methods, all that resulted was the necessity of publishing another book myself. (n. pag.)

The printer who saw himself as a creative artist found that he was committed to publishing more books under the Coach House banner. Although commercial work would continue to provide the press with operating capital for the next two decades, after 1965 the Coach House also became a small-press publisher where authors could have a say and help out in the production of their own books.

From the beginning, Coach House's investment in unique book design and high production value helped set the press apart from other publishers, both small and large. In 1967, David Godfrey who helped establish Toronto's other most famous alternative small press, the House of Anansi, stated that design was "probably the least important" reason that he and co-founder Dennis Lee went into publishing (107). Anansi printed its first books on cheap paper and in a one-colour format. Large Canadian publishers certainly had more resources to spend on book production. But, as Tim Inkster noted in 1974, "[w]hen McClelland & Stewart publishes a handsome book of poetry, it has, more like than not, been designed and produced by Frank Newfeld -- which makes for a beautiful book but doesn't necessarily do anything for the poetry" (13). Of course, Coach House books were often beautiful too -- not only in their attention to detail and hand-crafted feel but in their use of the best printing inks and paper available -- but they were also "aesthetic adventures in their own right" (Barbour 17). From George Bowering's *Baseball* (1967), which is shaped like a baseball pennant and covered in green felt, to Victor Coleman's *Light Verse* (1969), which contains numerous full-colour photographs, each filtered to create the effect suggested in the epigraph to the book's title poem, "light lights in air," Coach House sought through design to reflect the contents of its books.

If Bevington set out how Coach House would produce its books and provided the resources and expertise for their quality, it was Victor Coleman who was instrumental in deciding the kinds of books the newly-founded press would publish. 1967 was a watershed year for the press: it moved around the corner from Rochdale College and Coleman became its main -- arguably sole -- editor, a position he would hold for the next seven years. By the time he became Coach House's editor, Coleman had been

deeply involved in Toronto's fringe poetry scene for several years, having become, in 1963, a director and organizer of the Tuesday evening reading series for the Bohemian Embassy, a non-profit literary coffee-house where young writers, musicians, and artists gathered regularly to discuss and display their work. In 1964, he had started his poetry magazine *Island*, which ran for only two years but which Nicki Drumbolis has called "the primary little-mag in the east of the 'new wave' (i.e. third) of Canadian modernists" (n. pag.). Having met Bevington at a "salon" at Earle Birney's house and visited Coach House soon after at Bevington's invitation (Coleman, "Coach House Press" 26), Coleman quickly saw Bevington's small press as an exciting venue for continuing the work he had started at the Bohemian Embassy and with *Island*. A poet himself and disenchanted with mainstream publishing after working at Oxford University Press as an editorial assistant, he was particularly attracted to Coach House's collaborative approach to publishing. As much as collaboration appealed to Bevington because of the possibilities it offered printing, it appealed to Coleman because of the possibilities it offered language. Describing the Linotype machine the press used in the sixties and early seventies, Coleman recalls: "It was a total engagement with language, poetry; this was the way to redirect the canon-blind scripture. This was how to get those slacker poets into the mix. Allow them to get their hands dirty by helping to make their own books; a way to complete their collective vision of the new direction in Canadian writing and publishing" ("Coach House Press" 28). Coleman both firmly entrenched Coach House's direction as a writer's press and established the press's reputation as a producer of modernist Canadian poetry. Although Coach House never published poetry exclusively (it also turned out postcards, books of photography, fiction and non-fiction), it was quickly hailed by poets and readers with similar literary sympathies as an antidote to the established poetry scene.

Coach House's early avant-gardism was the product not only of its production methods, book designs, and literary aesthetics, but of what Bourdieu considers the defining characteristic of the avant-garde position, a disavowal of economic profit. Unlike commercial producers which seek to profit economically in the short-term by investing in products which have immediate appeal for larger audiences, avant-garde producers refuse economic gain by producing unconsecrated forms of art which attract the smallest markets and thus the smallest profits. Although Bourdieu reminds us that economic disavowal contains its own form of economic rationality in the accumulation of symbolic capital which always guarantees economic profit in the long run (*Field* 75), in its first years, before third wave modernism gained wider public acceptance, Coach House was an avant-garde producer *par excellence*. An editorial philosophy based in a responsibility to the writer and the work, rather than to the audience or even the press itself, compelled a rejection of traditional publishing mechanisms and the adoption of the most visibly anti-economic behaviours. Coach House had no marketing or sales arms, made no author contracts, and paid no royalties, at least not in the traditional sense. The press existed to publish writing *it* deemed "worthy" and to be a meeting place for writers with similar interests in formally experimental art. An editorial statement in Coach House's 1969 catalogue reads: "Coach House is a canker on the tongue of Mammon; a

song amidst the divers small internal combustions in a great dying community; a possibility of freedom in the prisons of our minds" (1). The press, as this comment suggests, saw its refusal of economic profit as intimately tied to its anti-establishment liberatory ideology.

The subsequent changes in the externally and self-perceived position of Coach House can generally be attributed to the process of consecration: as some of its authors, notably Michael Ondaatje, bpNichol, George Bowering, and David McFadden, gained recognition locally and nationally in the 1970s, the press which continued to publish at least some of their work consequently began to make a name for itself as a producer of increasingly accepted forms of Canadian writing. Bevington noted in 1978 that this phenomenon translated into that primary nemesis of avant-gardism, sales: "[A] few of the authors we started with have better drawing power today. . . . The ground rules of minimum sales have gone up" ("Stan Bevington Explains" 21). That Ondaatje and Nichol became official Coach House editors in the mid-70s heightened the impact that their individual successes had on the press. After Coleman left Coach House in late 1974 because he believed that Bevington was no longer committed to the old non-commercial philosophy of the press, an editorial collective of eight members, including Nichol and Ondaatje, replaced him. The growing appeal of the press's books for a larger audience included one institution of cultural conservation and consecration in particular, the university. Unlike Coleman who proudly proclaimed he was a high-school dropout, some of the new editors were university professors (Ondaatje and Frank Davey, another member of the original editorial collective, were at that time full-time professors at York University) whose academic affiliations helped tie the fortunes of the press to literary canon formation in the university. As David Rosenburg remarks, "In the rearview mirror of Coach House, the university coexisted on the level of marketing: both looked backward, mounting the netted butterfly on an edifice of bills. The art co-opted by the university blurred into the art of marketing" (14).

In 1985, near the end of the second editorial period, Bevington publicly affirmed Coach House's continued commitment to small profits and markets: "We're in a cultural publishing business where if a book has a strong influence on one person it's worth it" ("Coach House's Computer Craft" 52). In reality, however, by its second period, the press no longer was, nor could be, the young avant-garde producer it had been in the late 60s and early 70s. Its stature as a consecrated avant-garde producer meant not only that it had to admit principles of legitimation beyond the boundaries of its own clique but also, relatedly, that it had to moderate its denial of the economy. After the mid-70s, Coach House began to engage more seriously in the business practice of promotion and implemented a more traditional publishing infrastructure, including royalties, author contracts, and subsidiary rights, designed to protect the press and increase its control over market shares. The press was growing old, which, as Bourdieu warns, is an uncomfortable position for avant-garde producers weaned on opposition:

> A firm which enters the phase of exploiting accumulated cultural capital runs two different economies simultaneously, one oriented towards

> production, authors and innovation . . . the other towards exploiting its resources and marketing its consecrated products. . . . It's easy to imagine the contradictions which result from the incompatibility of the two economies. The organization appropriate for producing, marketing and promoting one category of products is totally unsuited for the other. (*Field* 104)

For Coach House, the contradictions imposed by consecration were not merely economic or material. As Tom Wolfe notes, avant-garde artists engaged in consummation, that is, success, become involved in psychological double-tracking: not only do they have to dedicate themselves consciously to anti-bourgeois values and the quirky god Avant-Garde, but also they have to keep one eye on the public, *le monde* (17). To be successful at double-tracking, Wolfe stresses, means maintaining a *sincere* commitment to the avant-garde (17). For Coach House, consummation involved a crisis of identity or, given the number of editors involved in negotiating the press's old identity as the ever-struggling rebel of Canadian Literature and its new one as literary seer with the power to confer national prestige on an author, a number of identity crises. Paraphrasing Coach House editor David Young in her article on the press in 1979, Katherine Govier wrote: "Around the editorial table there have been many long arguments about the market and endless discussions about how commercial Coach House can become without turning into a sausage factory. Some say they should try to publish books that will be read in 40 years time, never mind tomorrow. Others say that some books deserve a wide readership and therefore should be publicized" (16). While, overall, the editors remained sincere about being avant-garde, they nonetheless differed on what precisely constituted sincerity.

The tensions amongst the editors which began to emerge in the second period were exacerbated in 1986 when a financial crisis precipitated a restructuring of the press. Late in that year, the editors discovered that both the printing and publishing sides of Coach House were close to bankruptcy and that Bevington was divesting himself of his sole responsibility for the publishing house. In early 1987, Coach House legally became a non-profit organization with a board of directors, made up mainly of outsiders, which acted as management and took on the financial obligations of the press. The editors' reactions to the news were divided: some felt that they had let Bevington down by consistently publishing books with low sales and that the solution was to publish more commercial titles; others opposed this movement on the grounds that it would fundamentally alter the *raison d'etre* of the press. While they fought amongst themselves to create a new editorial structure which would be acceptable to all concerned, in a sense, the issue causing the most difficulty, commercialism, was out of their hands. While the stated aim of the third period was to publish a mix of titles, commercial and uncommercial, the fact that the editors now had to work with management to determine its annual publishing list ensured that commercial aims became increasingly predominant. In 1990, Coach House hired its first full-time publisher, Margaret McClintock, who through increased sales decreased the press's reliance on grants. Although the idea of

"commercialism" instigated the major debates within the press from the late 70s onwards, it was configured quite differently in the second and third editorial periods. In the second period, commercialism meant creating larger markets for the writing the editors deemed worthy, while in the third, it meant capitulating to market demands. Relations between the printing and publishing sides quickly deteriorated, and ironically, Bevington, on whose behalf these changes were initially implemented, felt that the press had become too opportunistic and was no longer primarily interested in publishing new forms of Canadian writing. He evicted it from its historic coach house location on Huron Street in 1992, and the press became a for-profit corporation in a ritzy new location on Prince Arthur Avenue, complete with a building doorman. Some of the editors were also displeased with the changes at the press. In his tribute to Coach House on its closure, Michael Redhill, an editor who served on the board for part of the last period, commented: "Some of these shifts were controversial and the press was buffeted by the tensions brought about by them. Some editors were angered, and some left the press."

One of the most telling indications that Coach House had fundamentally altered its avant-garde mandate in its last years was the overall reception of its books. As Redhill remarked: "This fall, Coach House was to publish 14 new books, by authors ranging from Dany Laferriere to Nicole Brossard to Andre Alexis. They represent the press's mandate writ small in a single season. I know these books will find homes. I hope they will make their publishers money and their authors happy." Although earlier in his article Redhill had maintained that "McClintock turned the press into a for-profit business without altering its publishing mandate," the assurance with which he claimed that these books would find new homes and perhaps even make money indicates how far Coach House had penetrated the mainstream. Another indication of how much the press had changed was McClintock's defense of her own competency at running a publishing house on the press's death in 1996. She quickly blamed the government for the demise of Coach House: "We'd been growing stronger and stronger as a business and we broke even every year. But essentially the kind of publishing that Coach House does cannot be done in Canada without grants (Ross, "Coach House Closes Doors" A10). The younger press would have considered explicit or implicit charges of its ineptness at business a compliment.

Given that the press grew into a cultural institution, the very idea of which is inimical to avant-garde discourses, how did the press sustain its avant-garde reputation so that its passing could be lamented not just as the loss of Canada's most significant small press but the loss of Canada's premiere "vanguard small publisher" (Struthers)? To a large degree, Coach House's avant-garde reputation is based largely in a nostalgic view of what the press was, rather than what it became. Coach House's early avant-gardism which encompassed all aspects of the press, from the lifestyles of its members to its literary aesthetics, took on the status of myth that prevailed through changes in the reputation of the press and its books. The myth of Coach House affected not just the larger Canadian literary community but members of the press as they negotiated the press's relationship to mainstream culture of which their press increasingly became a part. Given the importance of economic disavowal to the avant-garde position,

"commercialism" became the site of struggles at the press as it moved through its various incarnations as a writer's press, an editor-run press, and finally a corporate enterprise. This chapter explores some of the conscious and unconscious strategies the press employed to maintain its association with the avant-garde press and how commercialism itself was reconfigured throughout the history of the press. There is no easy definition of commercialism. While Bourdieu defines commercialism as entering the "dialetic of profit" (*Field* 104), the experience of Coach House suggests the difficulty of pinpointing the moment when profit-seeking becomes too much for the avant-garde position to sustain.

The First Decade: Stan The Man, Vic D'Or, and the Writer's Press

"The collaboration between Stan Bevington (bedrock of technology and precision of design), and me (guiding editorial light, production gremlin, and chief fund raiser)," Victor Coleman wrote recently in his memoir of Coach House's first decade, "ultimately spawned a larger, seldom out-of-control, collective entity that progressed through an era of protest and discovery unmatched, in this writer's opinion, before or since" ("Coach House Press" 30). As Coleman suggests, the success of Coach House during its first editorial period cannot be attributed to the energies of any one or two individuals but to the much larger group of people who volunteered their time and talent to help produce the press's books. For a press which emphasized a "collective-production mode, i.e. involve as many eager hands as possible, provide them with plenty of peanut butter (or bologna) sandwiches and maybe some beer, and work long into the evening" (Coleman, "Coach House Press" 29), it seems especially important to name, as Coleman does, some of the other people involved with the press in those years. He gives special recognition to David Rosenburg and bpNichol but also mentions Michael Ondaatje, Frank Davey, David Young, Rick/Simon, David McFadden, and Sarah Sheard.[1] Nonetheless, the wealth of information on the press's first years (articles and archival materials) -- and Coleman's own parenthetical asides -- leave little doubt that Coleman, the only paid editor, and Bevington, the proprietor, dominated the press's activities throughout that period. While they could not have been more different in terms of their personal styles -- Bevington was the quiet, behind-the-scenes force and Coleman the outspoken, front man -- both men drew people and attention to the press so that to understand the charismatic position which Coach House came to hold in the field of

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[1] As Coleman emphasized at the beginning of his article, memory often proves to be unreliable: "Memory, like folded paper with its grain running the wrong way, is likely to wrinkle and crack. Cracked, folded, and put away, like anything you cherish. Fragile" (26). Coleman's inclusion of Sheard in the first editorial period is inaccurate. By her own account and Frank Davey's, she did not become actively involved in the press until 1978. See Sheard's "The heady fumes of ink and ideas" and Frank Davey's "The Beginnings of an End of Coach House."

Canadian literary production is to understand their own charismatic personalities.

As Rosemary Aubert commented in 1983, "Coach House Press -- and Bevington -- have always had the power to attract attention" (7). Even though Bevington has stated on more than one occasion that he modelled Coach House after the small-town newspapers he worked for in Alberta, his native province,[2] others have turned to a much different and earlier prototype to reflect the aura of fascination around the early press and its proprietor -- the early-modern print shop. In his chapbook *The Coach House Press,* the earliest extended account of the press, Tim Inkster draws a comparison between the early-modern age of printing and the early years of the Coach House:

> There is, in an old Toronto coach house on an alley at the rear of 401 Huron Street, a machine known as a Merganthaler Linotype at which bearded initiates work casting lines of poetry from a molten alloy consisting 10 parts lead, 4 parts antimony, 2 parts tin and trace quantities of copper . . . The printing of books, and especially those books (of literature) which bestow on their authors the possibility of 'indefinitely prolonged life', is thus seen to be not a trade but a crafte called magick. (9-11)

Bevington, as Inkster emphasizes, was the "master printer" (11) under whom the bearded initiates worked. It seems to have mattered little to Inkster that the machine at which the master printer and his initiates actually performed their "magick" or "alchemy," another term Inkster uses several times to evoke more explicitly the age of Gutenburg, was a Linotype machine, a mechanical method of typesetting and product of late nineteenth-century industrialization; what Inkster wished to evoke for his readers was the revolutionary spirit he saw at work at Coach House and in its books, and he found in the early printer's workshop a more apt parallel than the newspaper office or even the print shops of the first industrial period. Historian Elizabeth Eisenstein has emphasized that early master printers were the unsung heroes and their printing presses an unacknowledged agent of change of the political and intellectual revolutions of early-modern times (xi). That the master printer and print shop in question emerged in the second half of the twentieth century to challenge the tastes of the status quo made them appear all the more heroic and revolutionary. As Eistenstein notes, while the early printer was often criticized in his own historical moment for replacing the hand-produced books of scribes with machine-made products, the cumulative impact of recent technological

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[2] Bevington worked for Edson's *Leader* in 1960 and Fairview's *Post* in 1962 (Bevington "Draft Funding Proposal," n. pag.). He has suggested two reasons why he saw his press as similar to the small-town newspaper: the varied activities of Coach House (not just literary) was reminiscent of the newspaper office which "prints not only the news but the raffle tickets and maybe a few wedding invitations" (Govier 16) and the communal spirit of the press was akin to "the community focus he discovered in small-town newspapers" (Barber).

advance has rendered the incunabula of these printers into "highly valued scarce objects to be placed in glass cases and cherished as vestiges of a distant, lost past" (Eisenstein 19). In taking a version of incunabulum out of its glass case, however, Bevington performed a radical act for which the notion of scarcity remained crucial. Coach House's printer foregrounded the fact that he produced only small-run editions by including print-run information in his books (300-500 copies was typical in the first years) next to the press's icon, an old Heidelburg printer. The editions were also usually hand numbered and included the typesetting font, type of paper, and printer's name in its back papers.

Inkster's evocation of the early-modern period of printing for the early Coach House and Bevington, while certainly romanticized, does make sense in a number of ways. Not only did the first printing workshops fulfill both publishing and printing functions (Eisenstein 18), but they also "served as gathering places for scholars, artists, and literati; as sanctuaries for foreign translators, emigrés and refuges" (Eisenstein 23). Coach House, too, was both printer and publisher; it was also a place where writers and artists came to together to share their work and ideas and even a kind of safe haven for American draft dodgers in that the press printed fake IDs for them (Sheard 48). Bevington was similar to the early-modern printer in that he combined the early printer's roles as both businessman and patron of men of letters (Eisenstein 23). It is this image that David Rosenberg, who was a Coach House author and worked for the press from 1966 to 1972, draws on in his recent depiction of Bevington. "Stan," he writes,

> had the unique notion of supporting books with commerce, in order to avoid having to fit into the meagre and self-congratulatory marketplace for poetry, as is the case with writers founding a publishing house. Neither would he do it with arts grants, nor with academic dispensation -- but rather through his commercial operation of job printing. How often in a century is such a person born?
>
> Stan seemed to have arrived in Toronto from years of wandering in the desert, which in fact turned out to be Alberta. . . . (10)

Besides the obvious regional disparagement at work here, Rosenburg, like Inkster, ignores the facts, or chooses to relate only some of them, in order to emphasize Bevington's uniqueness. As early as 1967, some Coach House titles, Michael Ondaatje's *The Dainty Monsters* for example , carried an acknowledgement to Canada Council for financial assistance. There is no doubt that Bevington's commercial work helped support the publishing side of Coach House and gave it the freedom to function outside of market forces; however, typical of other small presses of the period, Coach House also relied on arts grants.

The tendency to mythologize Bevington as a heroic printer and patron saint of avant-garde art -- a tendency by no means limited to Inkster's and Rosenburg's descriptions of the press but found in some form in every article on Coach House -- speaks in part to Coach House's success as a publisher. It also speaks to Bevington's

personality. Alberto Manguel describes how "[s]ome say that Bevington *is* Coach House, but he doesn't like wearing laurels. For that reason, he prefers to let others do the talking" (62). Similarly, Aubert called him a "determined but gentle-appearing potentate" (6) and John Barber remarked on "his naturally soft voice" rising "over the steady thrumming of a vintage Heidelburg." As these descriptions highlight, Bevington's appeal derived as much from his modesty and quiet nature as from his ownership of the press. Bevington helped disseminate this picture of himself. In a 1967 interview in *Canadian Forum*, he maintained how he found the contents of Coach House books rather insignificant to the act of printing them: "I started publishing poetry because I wanted to print books, poetry seemed to give the books a topic, and the size of a poetry book is something I can handle" (107). A decade later, recalling the origins of the press, he repeated the basic message of his earlier claim: "My idea was to publish living Canadian writers in a very direct format. I posed as an illiterate. I have no desire to be a writer and I have absolutely nothing to say" (Govier 14). In spite of his direct involvement in the publishing house as an editor, Bevington disavowed his interest in literature and let others take the credit for Coach House's literary reputation. Ironically, the more he did so, the more he drew attention to himself and his press.

David Rosenburg's description of the young Victor Coleman as a "quiet, unassuming" visionary is strikingly similar to Manguel's of Bevington (13).[3] Yet this depiction of Coleman is at odds with the one that emerges in other accounts and in his own and the Coach House Press papers. Coleman believed that books of vanguard literature should embrace "the tradition of outrageous spectacle whenever possible" ("Coach House Press" 34), and it was a philosophy he took to heart for his own image. Even before joining Coach House, he exhibited his flair for the outrageous in a *Globe and Mail* article entitled "Poet says he doesn't want readers." Reporter Joseph Erdelyi wrote:

> "It isn't necessary for the general public to understand poetry, [Coleman] declares. "Any kind of mass poetry reading would lower standards."
>
> Because of his personal poverty Coleman claims he has attained the freedom to do as he pleases.
>
> . . .
>
> Wouldn't he like to reach a wider and maybe more profitable audience?
>
> The emphatic answer is no. "Not many people are willing to educate themselves," he says, "and I am not willing to un-educate myself."

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[3] Rosenburg also includes bpNichol and Michael Ondaatje in his description. He writes: "When bp and Victor and Michael Ondaatje were first published at Coach House, they were something far more interesting than careerists or unknowns in their twenties -- they were quiet, unassuming visionaries" (13).

Of course, the readership Coleman claimed not to want was the very one represented by the newspaper in which his bold assertion appeared. As Erdelyi summed up in his last sentence, "Victor Coleman is, obviously, not a missionary." Instead, he was a crusader on behalf of modern poetry whose personal ethics of material deprivation and limited readership and his vocal commitment to them would not change during his time at Coach House.

Coleman not only quickly became one of the "golden boys" of the Canadian avant-garde literary scene but, as the signature he used frequently on both personal and press correspondence -- Vic d'or -- suggests, he self-consciously adopted and worked to foster this image. A series of letters written by Cid Corman, editor of the American avant-garde magazine *Origin*, to Coleman from the fall of 1963 to the spring of 1968 reveal how the older established poet came to see the young Canadian quite differently from the portrait of the "unassuming" visionary that Rosenburg paints. Coleman initiated contact with Corman when he sent him several poems for possible publication in *Origin*. While Corman rejected these poems, he did see Coleman's work as promising and thus made the young Canadian poet a different offer. As Corman wrote, "Your work can 'wait' for publication at this point and I'd think conversation might be more useful (Dec. 9, 1963). The two initially struck up a rather frequent correspondence,[4] with Corman clearly in a mentorship role, offering both specific advice on poems that Coleman sent him and general advice on what he should be reading and how and when to publish his work. Within a few weeks of Corman's offer of "conversation," however, Coleman asked Corman for permission to use his name to help get his own work published. The mentor responded: "It isnt for me to approve or disapprove of your use of my name. You only can know if it is honest and accurate. What others think doesnt mean a damn to me and shouldnt to you. The responsibility, in short is yours -- not mine and not Dudek's" (Dec. 30, 1963 2). Corman's response is certainly ambiguous, although the comment which follows immediately and is the last one in the letter makes it far less so: "I think you'd do well NOT to send out work for publication for at least another year" (2).

Corman's next letter, written less than a month later, suggests Coleman did not heed his advice:

> thank you for the copy of THE LETTER poem. It is sad, of course, to me that your ambition exceeds your sense of courtesy -- that you sent it off for publication before letting me see it. You are young, indeed. OK. Use me -- that's an old story and am glad, as far as that goes, to be of use -- but don't abuse me. For that you will never earn my

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[4] Of the ten letters from Corman, who was living in Japan at the time, to Coleman which exist in the Coach House Press Papers at the National Library, seven were written between October of 1963 and May of 1964 with the other three in August of 1965, February of 1968, and April of 1968. Unfortunately, Coleman did not keep copies of his own letters to Corman.

> thanks.
> . . . You have, quite clearly, energy and a sense of your own possibility. I dont deny them. It is maybe too flattering to tell you, but you strike me as being the most promising youngster that has written in some time -- in Canada. (Jan. 18th, 1964 1)

Having only one side of the correspondence, it is difficult to know exactly what transpired. The comment "use me" may refer to Coleman's use of Corman's name in getting "The Letter" poem published or it may merely suggest that Coleman had refused Corman's advice to wait for publication. Regardless, Corman saw Coleman as ambitious, substantiated no doubt by the fact that in the very same letter in which Coleman informed him he had published the poem, he also asked Corman to do some "editing for him" for a poetry magazine he was starting up.[5] Corman responded, "I am not going to do any editing for you. You will have to SEE and FIND for yourself. Learn." (Jan. 18, 1964 1). He did add a bit of advice, however: "Do what you feel you can and must do. And do it to the top of your bent. Dont, if you do, editorialize. Let the work itself speak. And keep standards high, if not stiff. And dont start unless you have several issues pretty much in hand and a clear sense of its economy (as manageable). It's a tough job and a pretty thankless one and you will make unexpected enemies" (2).

Coleman turned to another poet and editor for help in starting up *Island*, Canadian Raymond Souster. Through *Contact* magazine (1952-54) and Contact Press (1952-67), Souster, along with Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, and Peter Miller, who replaced Layton in 1959, helped introduce Canadian poetry readers to the newly developing modernist American poetics which Corman's *Origin* embodied. *Contact* shared with *Origin* the primary poetic sources of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, and the third issue of *Contact* contained numerous poems by members of *Origin*. Corman and Souster were friends, and Souster had, in fact, recommended to Coleman that he write the American poet. Corman, as he indicated to Coleman, saw Souster as the "unsung protagonist of Canadian poetry" (Feb. 9, 1964 1). "Because he is self-effacing," Corman continued, "he is easily missed -- but he's never not around and his concern is abiding. And no one in Canada has ever had a more open mind towards poetry, past and present" (1).

Coleman and Souster became friends in the mid-60s and lived practically next door to each other from late 1964 to 1966. In a 1974 letter to Wynne Francis, Coleman outlined the beginnings of their relationship and his subsequent involvement with *New Wave Canada: The New Explosion in Canadian Poetry*, edited by Souster and one of Contact Press's last publications:

> ... late in '63 or early in '64 I had gone to see Souster to see if he would give me some hints on publishing a little magazine. He was very generous at that time and continued to encourage me throughout the life of

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[5] Although not named in Corman's letter, the magazine was *Island*.

> ISLAND PRESS (1964-1967). I submitted a ms to him and the other editors hated it. It probably wasn't very good. At the same time I got a look at George Bowering's ms and Frank Davey's. Ray wasn't sure abt Frank. So I did my damndest to encourage his understanding: he was frankly baffled by some of it. Anyway, Ray appreciated my reading and we began to talk about doing an anthology of younger people. Since CONTACT was only doing two books a year he was painfully aware of how inadequate it all was and was beginning to drift a little from the tastes of Dudek and Miller. So we drafted a letter to send to a list I supplied of about twenty young writers. Some of these didn't respond and a number snuck in through other influences, among them Ondaatje and Nichol (I'm sorry to say I missed them) & Jonas and Gill (who's [sic] writing I loathed at the time, & still do in the case of the former). I was in charge of production on that book and that story waits for larger residuals -- a horror tale if ever there was one. (1-2)

Although his name does not appear anywhere in the anthology except as a contributor of poetry, Coleman helped shape the contents of what would become one of the most influential anthologies in the development of contemporary Canadian poetry. As Souster outlines in his introduction to *New Wave Canada*, the text included young western and eastern Canadian poets influenced by Pound and Williams, with the westerners largely represented by the Vancouver-based Tishites and the easterners by people such as Coleman, David McFadden, and Roy MacSkimming.

Emerging just as the older press was closing down, Coach House was certainly seen as Contact's "spiritual descendent" (Bowering *Craft Slices* 30). In a letter to Dudek in 1966, Souster indicated that he himself saw it as such: "Now that Delta Press is firmly established and the Coach House Press and Island Press in Toronto are active, I don't think young and deserving talent will be badly served in the future. I think Contact Press has done the job it was founded to do -- we have bridged a very difficult time in Canadian letters -- and now it's largely history. What better time to call a halt?" (qtd. in Whiteman 19). As Nicky Drumbolis has suggested, Souster's anthology provided the direct link between the two presses: "... *New Wave Canada* may definitely be read as the significant point of transfer in the history of modern Canadian literature, from social realist second-wave modernism to new wave relativistic post-modernism, and I believe it clearly illustrates a partly conscious turning over of reins from Contact to Coach House Press" (n. pag.). Not only had Bevington assumed production of the anthology when printer Len Fox and Rubicon pulled out of the project, but Coleman followed on his direction for *New Wave Canada* when he began editing for Coach House. As Coleman noted to Francis, "I asked most of the people on *my* list for NWC for mss and a number came through right away. Others, like Hogg & Wah & Marlatt & Dawson & Gilbert took a little more time and concentration. Making connections with all those people was extremely important, I thought, so I jumped at the chance of going out there the first time" (2).

Between 1965 and 1967, Coach House published only three other books after *Man in a Window* -- Henry Beissel's *New Wings for Icarus*, bpNichol's *The Birth of O*, and Joe Rosenblatt's *The LSD Leacock*. By 1967, Bevington was getting little direction from Clifford and Reid, and Coleman, who first joined the press as a Linotype operator in the spring of that year, began, as he recalled, "browbeating him abt his responsibilities to the writers etc." (Letter Francis 1). Coleman continued:

> It went on for some time. Stan had a ms to hand from bp wch would have amounted to a slim volume of relatively conventional stuff. I had been rejecting these poems as fast as they came in to ISLAND and had begun a long-lasting relationship with bp (before CHP, bp, Dave Aylward and I put together Bill Bissett's first book, WE SLEEP INSIDE EACH OTHER ALL, in the attic of my house in the west end) wch culminated in my eventually convincing Stan that bp had more than he was showing. The result: JOURNEYING & the returns, a breakthrough book if ever there was one. With the success of this venture I guess my credibility in Stan's eyes grew somewhat and he encouraged me to take on more stuff.

Journeying & the returns challenged the arbitrary boundaries between mediums: the first part is a 48-page long poem, the second a recording of two sound poems, and the third 15 visual concrete poems. It was, as Coleman notes, "the first Coach House book to receive any appreciable attention in the mainstream literary press, although it also garnered remarks such as 'You call this a book?'" ("Coach House Press" 29).

Both Coleman and Bevington needed what the other had to offer: Bevington needed someone who jumped at chances to make literary connections and whose sense of his own possibility translated into a unique publishing program for the press; Coleman needed someone who had the desire and resources to experiment with form in order to allow writers to get involved in the production of their own books. Both have been described as geniuses -- Bevington as a "brilliant eccentric printer" (Ross "Coach House Closes Doors" A10) and "software visionary" (Ross "Coach House Reborn") and Coleman as an "editorial genius" (Francis "Little Magazine/Small Press Movement" 96) and "editor of proven genius" (Davey Letter to Robin Farr 2) -- and the differences in their geniuses which these descriptions underscore built the foundations of the press.

In spite of their different personalties and skills, differences which ultimately provoked Coleman's departure in 1974 and almost tore the press apart, there was, as Rosenburg describes, "something in common in the minds of Stan and Victor Coleman, a vision that required a sharp critique of the mainstream" (10-11). While their shared critical vision was grounded in anti-bourgeois materialism, it manifested itself in other directions, for instance, a rejection of the pervasive nationalism of the 60s and early 70s. Ironically, in a nationalistic gesture which the early press refused, the mainstream typically represented Coach House as Canada's own homegrown literary press, especially once it began to attain renown. The press's success was read as the success of the government funding initiatives for arts and cultural programmes which emerged

during the centennial heyday. Neither the numerous articles on Coach House's death, despite their insistent returns to the press's origins, nor the 1996-97 National Library of Canada's exhibit of Coach House's first decade, *New Wave Canada: Coach House Press and the Small Press Movement in English Canada in the 1960s,* have done anything to alter this perception. Condemning in particular the National Library exhibit for purging the press of its "foreigners and foreign influences" and presenting it "as a Canadian cottage industry," Rosenburg emphasizes, "To the contrary, I had been supported by Victor and Stan in the editing of books by American poets like Lewis Warsh and Tom Clark, in collaboration with American artists like Joe Brainard and Jim Dine (11).[6] Rosenburg, a Detroit native, became a co-editor for the press around 1971, but had been involved with the press in the late 60s through *The Ant's Forefoot*, one of the several periodicals produced at Coach House and one which published mostly new American writers. Besides books by Warsh and Clark, the press published other Americans' works such as Bill Hutton's *A History of America* (1968), Alan Ginsberg's *Iron Horse* (1972), Robert Creeley's *His Idea* (1973), and Rosenburg's own *Disappearing Horses* (1969) and *Leaving America* (1972).

Coleman's refusal of a national agenda for Coach House was the natural extension of the poetics he supported and of the writing communities in which he took part even prior to joining the press. As Coleman describes, in 1964 he began frequent visits to Buffalo, New York, and Detroit to hang out with the American, and also British and other Canadian writers living in and visiting those cities, whom he had contacted through *Island* and the Bohemian Embassy. With evident pride, he notes how the two senior American poets, Ginsberg and Creeley, offered the press their manuscripts, gratis, in support of the political and aesthetic work the press was doing ("Coach House Press" 27, 32). Although the majority of authors he published at Coach House during his eight years as editor were Canadian, he did not base his editorial decisions on any of the typical pro-Canadian sentiments of the day and saw his community as pan-national.

As part of the recent retrospective of Coach House in the 1997 issue of *Open Letter*, both Rosenburg's and Coleman's articles from which I quoted in the preceding two paragraphs have done much to re-write the Canadian-biased history of the press. Nothing, however, in even these revisionist histories has been said of Bevington and how he encouraged an international perspective and reputation for Coach House -- beyond, of course, the fact that he supported the editors in whatever their editorial choices were.

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[6] In her foreword to the catalogue, National Librarian, Marianne Scott, writes, "During the 1960s, Canadian literature, along with other forms of cultural creativity, experienced an unprecedented explosion thanks in part to the readiness of Canadians to know our collective identity. Homegrown small presses and literary magazines own and edited by Canadian writers nurtured Canadian writing and writers coast to coast. . . . Among these, The Coach House Press is, perhaps, the most innovative and significant of all the literary presses to have been founded in the 1960s" (5). The exhibit, curated by David McKnight and held from June 21, 1996 to February 20, 1997, lives on on the Internet. See www.nlc-bnc.ca/events/coach/e-chp.htm.

Even though Bevington had used the nationalism of the period to finance the opening of his print shop -- in the spring and summer of 1964, he silk-screened thousands of copies of the proposed designs for the new Canadian flag and sold them for a dollar a piece on the streets of Toronto, eventually selling "enough symbols of Canadian identity to buy both a printing press and a red sports car" (Manguel 62) -- as he developed as a creative printer, his work at Coach House drew interest internationally. In a promotional letter about his forthcoming history of Trigram Press of London and the poetic and artistic renaissance of the 1960s, *Autotypography*, Asa Benveniste, founder of Trigram, locates Coach House in world-wide community of what he calls "the most inventive typographers and printers": "Today, as evident in the books which come from such presses as Trigram, Coach House, Black Sparrow, The Jargon Society, Auerhahn, Cranium, Goliard, Tedtrad, Edition Hansjorg Mayer, Burning Deck et al., the best of book production, that is the most lovingly committed, is always linked to the best of today's literature and art" (n. pag.). Benveniste's admiration for Bevington's work is evident not only in that he included Coach House second only after his own Trigram but also in his personal note to Bevington on the promotional letter: "Dear Stan: thought you might like to see the publisher handout for a book that may never see the light of day. But if it does I'd like to reproduce one or two or more pages from a C.H. book or two, if you'd like to choose the ones you think are best. If that's possible. Everyone seems to be moving to Toronto. Hope things are OK."

While rooted in a sense of artistic community, or two overlapping artistic communities, which knew no political boundaries, Coach House's internationalism became part of its anti-establishment mind set; that is, it was not merely international but anti-national. Canadian nationalism's ties to mainstream culture and politics suggest an inherent coherence between anti-national and anti-mainstream sentiments, yet most counter-culture presses embraced the pro-Canadian mind set of the day. Anansi, for instance, had "a national mission" (MacSkimming 2). As Dennis Lee remarked in the mid-80s,

> We took the 'nationalistic' fervour of the late 1960s for granted. When we started we didn't know if anyone else felt this way -- but we (Dave and I) did, and that seemed to be enough. It was something we talked about a lot, harangued others (like the Ontario Royal Commission on Publishing) about, and so on -- but it was also something we acted on daily. I believe all the people who contributed thousands of man hours of work -- and so they were effectively 'contributing' it since our pay was so minimal -- shared some version of those convictions. (qtd. in Price 61)

Even when Anansi published texts by American authors, it transformed them into pro-Canadian political statements. As Jennifer Andrews outlines in her history of Anansi, the publication of Alan Ginsberg's *Airplane Dreams* by the press in 1968 became a tool to fight American protectionism and the inequities of U.S. copyright laws for Canadian publishers (11). In the late 60s, the manufacturing clause of the U.S. copyright law

maintained that any American-authored text which was produced outside of the United States in a quantity of more than three thousand could be pirated by American publishers without the author's permission. Anansi printed six thousand copies of Ginsberg's book and shipped them to the States complete with bookmarks denouncing the clause. Andrews writes, "For Dennis Lee, using Ginsberg's book as a means of protest was intended to demonstrate 'a desperate anger about the fact that we've never taken this country seriously enough to fight for it'" (11).

Coach House's early attitude to the government funding that the centennial celebrations inspired was ambivalent at best. Although the press prided itself on being self-sustaining because of its commercial printing operation, it was not adverse to using funding to expand its publishing programme. In a letter to Derryll White in 1973, Coleman exhibits a very pragmatic approach to negotiating its anti-nationalistic mandate within a funding structure designed specifically to help Canadian writers:

> It seems to me useless to fight the CANCOW mooing about NATIONalism these days...time is just not politically ripe for such.... It seems to be a simple quirk and one that I have to respect. Publish yer Amurricans on your own bread, baby, is what they're saying: and 99% of the so-called Canadian Independents are forcing them into it. Actually, they're giving us a big block grant for '73 wch has nothing to do with the titles we publish, except they only want to *hear abt* the Canadian ones in our reports to them. They know what we are doing, vaguely. (1)

Established in 1972, the block program grants more arm length's approach gave the press the freedom to publish its Americans and still be eligible for money. Yet, in another instance, Coach House's revenue from the printing side enabled Coleman to complain directly to the Canada Council about its funding policies. In his 1969 application for project grants for Bill Wilson's *High Park Regained*, Michael Ondaatje's *The Man with Seven Toes*, William Hawkin's *The Gift of Space*, and David Cull's *Cancer Rising*, Coleman wrote to Naim Kattan of the Council:

> I have not changed my mind about your new policy; I think it constitutes an infringement of editorial autonomy, & I fail to see its usefulness from any standpoint, especially that of the publisher. . . .
>
> I suspect whoever read the three mss we sent last year was not too sympathetic with the kind of writing that we are interested in publishing & can suggest that there are 'respectable' readers you could send these to who would better understand the intention. It is embarrassing, as an editor, to have to do all this; it is doubly embarrassing when some faceless creature judges unfavorably something I and my colleagues find worthy. (1)

The difference in attitude between the two letters highlights the impact that the block

program had on the press. Since the Council awarded block grants according to the size of a press and number of titles it published per year, small presses were encouraged to expand their lists. The impact of these policies on Coach House became obvious soon after receiving its first block grant in 1973. At this time, the press consistently began to publish 12-15 titles annually, as compared to its earlier half dozen or so. The possibilities offered by a larger lump sum of money was harder to renounce than the earlier project grants.

Block grants also affected the day-to-day operation of Coach House. In its first editorial period and part of its second, the press rarely paid royalties to authors, at least in cash. As Coleman outlined for Anthony Adamson of the Ontario Arts Council:

> At the outset we offer the writer 10% of the retail value; but we split it in half by offering 5% of the run of the book (in an edition of 1000 that's 50 copies; compared to the usual dozen or sometimes less offered by most publishers, which seems the strongest point in our royalty policy if you ask our authors); the remaining 5% can be requested at any time, although many of our returning authors will wave this in lieu of a free pick of our new titles. We realize this may seem irregular, and hope you are not under the impression that we have achieved what we have by being regular; we have not. (1)

Authors could use the press as a warehouse and made money from their books by selling copies at readings and to friends. But, as Frank Davey remarks, this system of payment resulted in a visible lack of control over stock as both back and frontlists grew in the 1970s, directly affecting the management of reprints (personal interview). For Coleman, though, irregular was good, and the policy itself was never stated contractually because Coach House was trying to avoid the "bad feelings that such forms often cause among writers and publishers and editors (not to mention printers); and since we are all these things we found that word of mouth was the most trustworthy method" (Letter to Anthony Adamson 1).

Not only did the royalty system become increasingly difficult for the press to manage, but not all Coach House authors were as enthusiastic about it as Coleman suggested, especially out-of-town authors who did not have access to the warehouse. David Bromige, living in California at the time, wrote to Coleman in October of 1973, expressing his concern over royalties on his forthcoming book, *Birds of the West*:

> No word from you about royalties. Perhaps you're above such things. A cavalierness not possible to those of us who chose less remunerative profession than printer. I need to break free of the slavery of the cal state college system (4 courses/semester, no allowance for independent studies etc etc) at first possible opportunity. Hence my having the unmitigated gall to mention money to a publisher.
>
> You *sell* the books, so must know something of ((money)). I

> know you do not pay royalties, because I heard Tom Clark never got his 2nd installment (or something. 3rdhand literary gossip but presume a certain amount of fire under the smoke.)
>
> So lets get it out in the open between us. Should have been done from the start. Obviously you too have to live. A clear statement from you about costs, subsidies, projected sales, etc. would be a starting point. Fair's fair. (1)

Being a Coach House author, as Bromige clearly recognized when he remarked on his "unmitigated gall" and placed double parenthesis around "money," meant sharing in or at least outwardly valuing the press's anti-economic stance to some degree, especially when up against Coleman's forceful personality. Bromige's sense that Coleman would be displeased by his letter was well-founded. In response, not only did Coleman outline his own dire financial situation in a kind of one-up-man-ship of personal hardship (he notes that he was pulling in only $480 a month before taxes from which he had to support a family of six who needed shoes and to go the dentist) and that of the press (the bookstores got about 40%, jobbers another 45%, and "Book People" even more), but he reminded Bromige of the importance of anti-economism for the integrity of art:

> This letter of yours is the second real instance of this kind of foolishness from you. One would hope someone like yourself would not put such pressure on a fellow writer, even if he *was* also an editor/publisher/printer. Calling what I do remunerative is almost enough to make me want to dump you into the sticky laps of the *real* villains -- the editors who aren't writers -- and see what kind of mincemeat they'd make of you thru elaborate contracts that would make what you do sound marvellously valuable while filching from your unguarded pockets what little respect you had left. (1)

In a final *cout d'etat*, Coleman described other Coach House authors who obviously cared little for money and more for the press: "Strangely, most of our closer writers usually wave their royalties. They come by regularly, and hence understand that we none of us has money to throw around." Of course, these "good" authors, to which Bromige is by implication the reverse image, were the very ones who benefitted most from Coach House's royalty policy, a point Bromige made in his next letter to Coleman: "I *wish* I could come by the coachhouse regularly" (1). Bromige's letter is overall extremely conciliatory. While his October letter was addressed more formally "Dear Victor," his November one begins "Vic d'or," at once more personal and an acknowledgement of Coleman's genius -- sincere or not -- and thus his correct assessment of the royalty system. "Thanks for filling me in on the royalty situation," Bromige wrote. "Sounds ok. Sorry my asking you to do so upset you."

Approximately a year after the above exchange, Coleman left Coach House. While the incident with Bromige was in no way related to his departure, it nonetheless

serves as a useful transition to a discussion of the end of the first editorial period because it highlights just how fiercely Coleman remained committed to the idea of a non-commercial writer's press. What changed by 1974 was his belief that Coach House could continue to be that kind of press. Although growth in size and reputation was at least partially responsible for reconfiguring the Coach House Coleman had loved and enthusiastically championed, a more specific event provoked his exodus -- Bevington's purchase of computers for his printing operation. Both the purchase of the computers and the computers themselves symbolized for Coleman all that was wrong and about to go even more wrong at Coach House.

Bevington had begun Coach House with a 1917 model Linotype, but was, as Alberto Manguel writes, "from the very start . . . interested in using computers for the typesetting side of the business" (62). By 1972, he had saved enough money to buy two Datapoints, general-purpose forerunners of present-day computers, to do typesetting, but quickly found this equipment too slow. As Bevington wistfully reminisced in 1988, "Each had 16K. If that means nothing to you, just think that an ordinary computer today has 1,000K" (Manguel 63). In 1974, he replaced his Datapoints with faster technology using, or so Coleman believed, that year's block grant from the Canada Council. Coleman, away in British Columbia, learned the news through David Young who was keeping him updated on Coach House business. On July 20, Young wrote Coleman:

> The other thing that happened today was that Stan The Man left the attached billet doux on my desk. I'd been trying to get our banking system in order since the day the cheque arrived -- predictable bad luck of always catching Stan just as he was going out the door. Anyway, on Friday there were some complications, we had to get some figures from Sheila (flashback to Stan scratching his beard in Vince Kelly's office). I was very understanding, I know how it is out there in the dog eat dog world, a guy forgets a few things, besides, it's no easy chore fitting that pocket calculator up your ass, even with copious gobs of vaseline. So . . .
>
> . . . today we get it "straightened out" -- it seems that the block grant is gone. Eighteen thousand dollars in four business days. The dogs call this wheelin 'n' dealin. If you have a pocket calculator up your ass it's the only way of reaching orgasm. Other men need to stand beside burning buildings.
>
> So much for the negotiated strategies of rational men. Naturally there was a "plan" -- all after the fact naturally -- we'll raise more money, publishing will have a "credit" with printing for all the money The Man spends in fag bars, we get first choosies about which outstanding accounts will go unpaid for six months next winter, which authors will be peed on in the hot box. (1-2)

The "plan" was obviously unacceptable to Coleman who broke all ties with the press by

November.[7]

Both the level of frustration that Young expressed in his letter and his concern for Coach House authors are mirrored in Coleman's letter of resignation to Coach House contributers. In that letter, Coleman wrote:

> It is with deep regret that I inform you of my intention to leave the Coach House Press. Over the past few years my work as editor/publisher has become increasingly untenable. I now firmly believe I have no other choice but to resign.
>
> Throughout my time with CHP I have tried to perform a specific service to a community of artists and writers (many of whom I had little in common with beyond a like intention to properly present their work in print, giving them as much control over the production as possible) involving personal contact, deep discussion about the nature of possible projection of the work and, I feel, much good will and trust. In some ways that good will and trust has been betrayed because I had little effective control over the end-product of our labours.
>
> The Coach House Press has become a sweat shop, its crowning glory being the accumulation of machinery and wage slaves, not a very conducive atmosphere for the kind of publishing pioneered under the CHP banner. (1)

As this letter reveals, the computers represented two problems for Coleman. The first related to editorial control, specifically over finances. As both Young and Coleman indicate, Bevington's unilateral decision to purchase the computers, allegedly using monies intended for the publishing side, was not the first instance where they felt they had little say in the financial matters of the publishing house, though it seems to be the one which "firmly" convinced Coleman to resign. The second involved the viability of computer typesetting for a small press like Coach House. As much as Bevington believed that better computer typesetting equipment would allow the press to produce higher quality books more cheaply, Coleman disagreed, though his reaction seems based less in any knowledge about computers than in a general antithetical attitude to technology. Using imagery quite different from Young's references to homosexuality, he conveyed his anger and dismay over the changes at the press through references to nineteenth-century industrialization. Through the terms "sweat shop" and "wage slaves," he evoked all the horror with which we view the first period of industrialization, including notions of anti-individualism and reduction in both quality of life and quality of hand-made products, for the new computer technology at Coach House. For Coleman, Coach House could not remain as it was, a small non-commercial cottage industry with the

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[7] As Coleman indicated in his undated letter of resignation to Bevington, he felt it was "impossible to up and quit" because of his responsibility to the authors whose manuscripts he promised to publish through Coach House.

artist-as-volunteer as its backbone, under the emerging conditions. Dismissively categorizing the computers as "machinery," he felt not only that they were a waste of money but that they would fundamentally undermine the *raison d'etre* of the press.

Almost two and a half decades later in "The Coach House Press: the First Decade. An Emotional Memoir," Coleman admitted the error of his thinking with respect to computer technology. Describing his "many" reasons for leaving the press in 1974, which included a "general dissatisfaction with the role of senior editor/production manager" and an increasing engagement "with media other than print" (33), he turned to the issue of computers: "The other major reason was my rather naively myopic view of the new technologies of print; namely the dreaded computer/word processor. I was, somewhat stupidly, reticent to take on this new technology and can see now that this arose out of fear and trepidation in relation to inability to master all the new gadgets" (33). As Coleman emphasizes more than once in his remark, hindsight has enabled him to turn the blame for his resignation from what he had considered at the time to be Bevington's shortsightedness to his own shortsightedness. The intervening years proved that the "genius" of the press's printer exceeded that of its editor. Computer typesetting changed the face of the publishing industry. By bringing the typesetting function back into the publishing house, it created new opportunities for those that benefit most from savings in production, small presses. Credited with initiating computer typesetting in Canada, Bevington shared his knowledge and enthusiasm for computer technology with presses across the country and has been instrumental in the growth of the small press movement in the last two decades.[8] In terms of Coach House itself, the computers were not detrimental to the author's role in production as Coleman had feared, and Coach House authors continued to help out at the press. In spite of the thousands of dollars of blinking computer equipment, the press retained its open house quality. As Michael Redhill remarks,

> At various times in the 1980s, you could find Jason Sherman or Kevin Connolly or Nicky Drumbolis or Linda Spalding or David McFadden or Roger Greenwald there, in editing or publishing mode, slaving over the hot computers as they put out their various journals and chapbooks. We would let ourselves in and out, sometimes in the dead of night, with keys founder Stan Bevington had entrusted with us [sic]. The atmosphere of publishing-at-the-grassroots as a shared enterprised was one of the gestures of generosity Coach House was known for.

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[8] Bevington not only taught at the Banff Publishing Workshop but presented seminars in other parts of Canada. For example, in 1984, Bevington gave a professional development seminar on computer typesetting in Edmonton, which led to the creation of Altabits, a consortium of Alberta publishers who successfully approached the Department of Communications and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for money and then implemented computer typesetting within their presses (NeWest Press).

Although hot computers replaced the hot lead of the Linotype, the communal spirit of its early years prevailed.

But what Coleman also failed to foresee in 1974 was how Bevington and his computers would help maintain Coach House's association with the avant-garde. As the press's books increasingly came to be recognized beyond the immediate circle of Coach House writers and artists, Bevington's continued enthusiasm with computer technology kept the press ahead of the game in terms of printing, production, and design. Not that the press gave up old technologies completely. As designer Rick/Simon comments, "We've always used the best of historical stuff while trying to go beyond the edge of modern technology" (qtd. in Barber). The combination of the old and new kept Coach House members enthusiastic about the press, and fascinated outsiders as well. A *Quill & Quire* article in 1985 contrasts the old and new technologies at the press:

> The first thing you see when you step inside the door at Toronto's Coach House Press is a massive Linotype. It seems out of place at the company long acknowledged as the industry's most advanced computer user. Nonetheless, this reputation is soon confirmed by the laser typesetter that you spot upstairs. The contrast between these two machines seems to symbolize the essence of Coach House Press: an almost medieval concern for craftsmanship coupled with a 20th-century lust for efficiency. ("Coach House's Computer Craft" 52)

As Katherine Govier suggests in her article on "Canada's busiest and weirdest 'little press'" that housed both an "'antique' Linotype machine" and "the blipping and blinking of around half a million dollars worth of computer and software equipment" (14), Bevington's image became the image of the press: "He seems to be the rare kind of man who wants to realize ideas; his talents with computer and systems rapidly became apparent. Coach House reflects his own curious blend of anachronism and technocrat" (14).

The Middle Years: The Editor-Driven Press

After Coleman's departure, the editorial decisions at Coach House would never again be dominated by one individual. As Coleman notes, "Whatever gap I left as the 'guiding light' of Coach House publishing policy was quickly filled by a committee consisting of writers and designers who had previously acted in consultancy roles" ("Coach House Press" 33).[9] At first the committee, or collective, was ad hoc, concerned mainly with controlling the damage caused by Coleman's resignation, especially with respect to its main funding sources, the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council,

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[9] In 1973, Coleman had called these consultants "outside" editors, naming three: Frank Davey, bpNichol, and Michael Ondaatje (Letter to Anthony Adamson 1).

but also Coach House authors who had worked closely with Coleman and who in many cases had formed personal relationships with him. In his July letter informing Coleman that the block grant was gone, Young suggested a plan for their remaining months at the press:

> Suddenly it seemed quite simple. We see a few carefully chosen projects through to proper completion, make the necessary notifications to other authors by registered letter, explain our position to the C.C. and then float the For/Words breadbasket to new moorings. I see no need for panic at this point, when the time comes at end-August it should be calm deliberate and completely ruthless. My guess is that if we rock the boat now all projects will be completely ripped off and Stan will do something like hire Michael Mackrel to edit and consolidate . . . . (n. pag.)

Young's plan was roughly how things transpired, except that Young himself stayed with the press and only Coleman departed to A Space which offered him a place to start up the For/Words Foundation. Because Coleman left harbouring ill feelings for Bevington, his actions until he finally left in November *were* ruthless, involving sabotage attempts on Coach House. Not only did he take a number of Coach House manuscripts with him, but sometime in late October or early November he wrote to the Canada Council charging the press with a misuse of its grants.[10] Although the Council never did pull its funding from the press, this was a very serious accusation which could have had devastating repercussions. On behalf of Coach House, Frank Davey wrote to Robin Farr of the Canada Council:

> As for Victor's charges about the finanical operation of the Coach House Press in his recent letter to you, I know very little about the various commitments that have been made regarding administration of funds. In considering these charges, it probably should be remembered that the Coach House is both commercial printer and a literary press; literary publishing, in fact, by far comprises the smaller portion of its gross business. I do know for a fact that the new computer equipment has been purchased by Stan Bevington not through Canada Council and Ontario Arts money but through an $8000 loan from The Imperial Bank of Commerce and an approximately $22,000 loan from International Acceptance Corporation (IAC). (2)

Where exactly the money for the computers came from -- grants or loans -- remains unclear, but perhaps in an effort to cover all bases, Davey went on to remark that he believed, and hoped the Council would agree, that enhancing the press's overall

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[10] In a letter to Ron Evans of the Ontario Arts Council, Frank Davey indicates that Coleman took eight manuscripts with him (2).

performance was more important than scrutinizing particular expenditures.

Just over a week following his letter to Canada Council, Davey was forced to write another one, this time to Ron Evans of the Ontario Arts Council. Although he had asked Farr to give Coleman "more than minimal assistance in launching his new venture," emphasizing that Coleman was "an editor of proven genius, and almost entirely responsible for the uniqueness of the Coach House program over the past seven years," his tone in the letter to Evans is much less supportive of Coleman. It seems that Davey discovered in the meantime that Coleman's efforts to undermine the press were more severe than he had thought: Coleman did not just take a few manuscripts and authors with him but was determined to take half of Coach House's grants with him as well. As Davey wrote to Evans, "I know from talking with Victor that he hopes to obtain for himself one-half of the Coach House's government subsidies and to eventually reduce the Coach House Press to a non-publishing contract printer" (2).[11] With far more at stake now, Davey presented Coleman's editorial role quite differently: "Coach House has never been synonymous with Victor Coleman; his departure does not in any sense remove the head from the body. Many authors -- particularly Ondaatje and [Matt] Cohen -- dealt directly with Stan Bevington and completely circumvented the apparent editorial process" (2).[12] Although to Farr he remarked that "the estrangement between editor and printer/publisher at Coach House had been destroying its morale and commitment" (2), to Evans he presented it as a much longer-standing problem: "A relevant fact here is that there has never been a great deal of cooperation between Victor and Stan Bevington" (1).

Again Coleman's efforts failed but they nonetheless caused a lot of tension at the press beyond the immediate fear of losing government funding. Having received Coleman's letter announcing his resignation and his view that the press had turned into a

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[11] Only Coleman's letter to Evans, and not his letter to Farr, is contained in the Frank Davey Papers at Simon Fraser University (neither are in the Coach House Press papers at the National Library). Coleman wrote to Evans: "The question immediately arises as to whether OAC will continue to support the Coach House Press 'cultural' grant rip-off . . . What I am asking for, initially, is at least half of the annual operating grant that would have gone to Coach House Press" (2). Although this letter is dated November 5th, before Davey wrote Canada Council, the very dramatic shift in tone suggests that Davey only knew about it after the 15th.

[12] A letter from Young to Cohen in December of 1973 confirms that Cohen circumvented Coleman when it came to *Peach Melba* (1974): "bp likes it, Frank likes it, Stan likes it, I like it. This is called general agreement. We needn't concern ourselves with hurdling Victor, the personal differences between you shouldn't have any bearing on what is without question your best mss to date. . . . I have no illusions about settling the dialogue between you and Vic d'or, as far as I'm concerned you can go on calling each other self-serving bastards till hell freezes over, all I want to do is publish the manuscript without wasting a lot of time while you guys confront each other" (n. pag.).

sweat shop, many Coach House authors, especially ones with upcoming books, panicked about the press's future. Davey also wrote at least one letter of reassurance to worried Coach House author, Ted Blodgett: "There are no immediate problems at the Coach House. Victor was in a rather fierce & paranoid space when he sent that letter around" (1). Worst of all, a letter from Davey to George Bowering indicates that Bevington was considering shutting down the publishing house:

> OK. If you've got Victor's letter, you'll know that as well as resigning he's been bad-mouthing Stan's operation to the OAC and the CanCoun; after all, he was pissed-off enough with Stan to resign. Also hopes to divert some of Stan's grants his way. This is a bad move, I think -- could tend to discredit him & his attempts to set up a new operation, & of course it obviously puts a lot of us in the middle. i.e. he leaves us relying on CHP at the same time as he attempts to undermine it. bp has two books there that Victor is not taking away, I've got 5 Fr-Can translations there that Stan has signed contracts for, & so on. To top it off, the whole episode has got Stan depressed, to the extent that he'd like to get bloody well out of publishing & into "something straightforward & simple" like contract printing. (1)

The investment in keeping Coach House alive was great for many authors and editors. Coleman, as Davey suggested to Bowering, was not moving his Coach House agenda to a new space, but was opening quite a different kind of venue: "Victor does intend to do some new things, ones he couldnt find room for at CHP, & they should spin some heads . . . One problem is that he doesn't have the time, or facilities for Beaver-Kosmos or OL, wch means we pretty well have to make sure CHP survives if we want to keep our push alive" (1). Davey focuses on Beaver-Kosmos and *Open Letter* here but other projects and authors were threatened as well including Nichol's *Zygal* and *The Martyrology Book III*, which, as Davey wrote to Evans, "is not to say that [Coleman] dislikes bp's work" but just that "other projects quite legitimately have precedence." Davey also remarked: "It is extremely unlikely that Victor will ever want to publish Matt Cohen, or that he will ever agree to publish Michael Ondaatje in the formats and press runs which Mike desires" (1).

Initially, neither Davey nor the other editors whom Coleman had previously consulted intended to become the new official editors of Coach House. As Davey wrote to Bowering in November, "Stan indicates that he'll take his time in getting a new editor, but god knows who it will be, & that cd, will be crucial for us" (2). Neither, it seems, was a group of editors what Stan had in mind. Nonetheless, by early in the new year a collective was established, and it began to acclimatize itself with general press business and establish an editorial structure. At the April 24, 1975 meeting, the new editors

decided that the permanent board would be composed of eight unpaid editors,[13] with each editor allowed to unilaterally select two manuscripts per year for publication provided that he or she oversaw production and allowed his or her name to be printed on the book as its editor. Further, it was decided that four books per year would be selected from the unsolicited manuscript 'slush pile' on the basis of a six-out-of-eight majority vote and that the Quebec Translation Series would continue to be edited by Frank Davey and Barbara Godard outside of this structure.

With Coleman no longer dominating editorial choices at Coach House, the press's list broadened in scope to reflect the various interests of the new editors. Although Coach House continued to publish a significant number of poetry titles during the second editorial period, it immediately moved into new areas. As the collective stated in its first newsletter in 1977, "Anyone who had followed our publishing programme for the last couple of years will no doubt have noted the brave emergence of fiction titles, many of them notoriously risky 'first novels,' on our in-print list" (2). *A Thousand Days in the Attic* (1976) by Valerie Kent, *The Peter Stories* (1976) by Gladys Hindmarch, *The Spiral Staircase* (1977) by John Bentley Mays, and *Criss-Cross and Other Tales* (1977) by John Riddell were some of its first fiction titles. The addition of fiction was due not only to some of its new editors' interests but also to the new high-speed computer typesetting equipment which helped bring, as the newsletter explained, fiction publishing "marginally within range" (2). The press also confirmed its investment in the Quebec Translations Series which published English translations of experimental poetry and prose by French-language writers. Although the idea for the series arose at the end of Coleman's reign as editor, with the first publication planned for 1975, as Davey wrote to Bowering, "these Fr-Can things never had priority with Victor" (Nov. 17, 1974 1). *Jack Kerouac: A Chicken-Essay* by Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, published in 1975, was the first Quebec Translation with two titles following quickly in the next year: *A Book* and *Turn of a Pang*, both by Nicole Brossard. In the late 70s and 80s, Coach House would be the most important English-Canadian publisher to disseminate new writing by French-language authors.

In spite of their unilateral decision making power for most titles, the editors saw their new expanded board as a process of democratization, moving the editorial decisions from the hands of one to eight (Davey personal interview). Nonetheless, the unique editorial structure allowed Coach House, as Bevington noted, to "operate like a whole bunch of private presses" (qtd. in Aubert 6). The practice of including editors' names at the back of books (the description read either "edited for the press" or "seen through the

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[13] A publicity announcement issued sometime early in 1975 indicates the original members of the new collective were Michael Ondaatje, bpNichol, Frank Davey, Matt Cohen, Rick/Simon, David Young, Stan Bevington, and John Oughton ("Coach House Announces New Team"), while the minutes of the April 24, 1975 meeting lists a slightly different group as making up the permanent board: bpNichol, Stan Bevington, Michael Ondaatje, Linda McCartney, Rick/Simon, David Young, Frank Davey, and, surprisingly, "if he is willing, Victor Coleman" (1).

press") encouraged the perception of distinct aesthetic preferences among the editors, a perception grounded in enough reality so that at least a reader such as Doug Barbour could comment, "It was great fun to read a book and then check to see if you had guessed correctly" (19).[14] Although Coleman saw the changes in Coach House's lists as negative -- "My hand was still visible in the Coach House catalogue until 1978 and, although I never lost touch I didn't find the publishing programme that essentially engaging, writing it off as 'too many cooks'" ("Coach House Press" 35) -- most readers felt that there was something that held the Coach House list together. While Barbour admits that the editorial structure "made for a highly eclectic list," he emphasizes how "all the books seemed to belong there: they all had the Coach House aura" (19). Similarly, Stan Dragland remarks that although there was not anything necessarily exclusive about Coach House's aesthetic criteria, there was something typical about it, specifying the Coach House "feel" as an interest in language rather than theme, politics, nationalism, mythopoetics, and humanism.

While both Barbour and Dragland discuss Coach House poetry specifically, the same interest in language tied its fiction, drama, and Quebec Translation lists together. Trying to account for the phenomenon that readers, reviewers, and booksellers saw the Coach House imprint as something coherent, Valerie Frith, who would become the press's business manager in late 1986, offered "that despite their internal diversity, the editors are more like each other than they are like the rest of the world" (Report 4). Just as in its first editorial period, in its second, Coach House was charged by its critics as being a clique, "a self-appointed avant-garde devoted to a 'cult of the incomprehensible' . . . which printed books that nobody read and that simply sucked up government grants" (Marchand). The notion of the "incomprehensible," while viewed negatively by the press's critics, was valued positively by Coach House itself and others. It became a form of cultural capital which sold individual titles as well as it helped to construct the press's charisma.

The increased size of the editorial board resulted in other changes at the press. The editors agreed to meet regularly one evening every month to review the considerable flow of unsolicited manuscripts and discuss overall directions and future initiatives for the press. Although these meetings were relaxed social affairs in keeping with the non-business-like running of the press established in the first period (it was only in the conservative mid-eighties, Davey admits, that the editors agreed to stop smoking pot at editorial meetings because some of us began to question the impact this was having on our decisions [personal interview]), they were formalized through official minute-taking. The parodic tone of one of the first sets of minutes, January 1975, suggests how disconcerting this practice initially seemed for the Coach House:

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[14] Occasionally no editor's name appears in a book although in the these cases the author's acknowledgments tend to make it clear who the editor was, for example, Daphne Marlatt's *Zócalo*, in which Marlatt thanks Ondaatje for his editorial help. Books from the "slush pile" such as Richard Truhlar's *A Porcelain Cup Placed There* were labelled "an editorial collective selection."

Well then. At our last meeting the following little doggies were claimed by reluctant owners:

Title/Author	animateur
Halfway to the Factory/Poole	F. Davey
Now We Are Six/collection	S. Bevington
Zygal/nichol	heself
Wilson McDonald's Western Tour	M. Ondaatje
Farm Show	M. Ondaatje
The North Saskatchewan River Book	D. Young
The Tyros/Johnston 33	M. Ondaatje
Nelligan/Sarna	D. Young
Alphabet Book/Findlay	bp Nichol
Five. Fr. Can. novels	F. Davey

The kennel was circumscribed thusly:

1. No new mss unless you can win the fight
2. No fighting in the cloakroom
3. Owner must clean up after their dogs and generally treat them like people.
4. Everybody's too busy.
5. The sky's the limit.

In addition, at 9:49 p.m. Don Black squatted on one knee at the east end of the table and whispered a soft warm word that thickened the backs of our throats and made us want to think about it all until the next meeting. The word was *promotion* -- the reason why all of us are so proud not to be involved and yet, at the same time, somewhere on a porch after too many beers, "a little misty".

Say the word to yourself -- promotion -- imagine the buying habits of someone you love, make a little list and bring it to our next meeting on Wednesday, February 5 at 9:00 p.m., the usual place. (1-2)

The unknown writer of these minutes parodied not only the formal act of taking minutes but also the need to hold regularly scheduled meetings and to promote Coach House books. Promotion and, along with it, sales especially seems to have instilled anxiety in the writer, who constructs it as a surreptitious act in light of the strong commitment to keeping Coach House, ideologically at least, much as it always was -- "the sky's the limit," i.e. avant-garde.

Subsequent minutes of board meetings are far more formally written so that the January 1975 minutes are anomalous in terms of their sustained parodic style. However, I have quoted these early minutes at length because they point to the press's tendency

during the second editorial period to rely on parody as a form of cultural critique, especially when it came to selling itself and its books. Sarah Sheard, hired in 1978 as the press's first publicist, notes in her recent article on Coach House, "By 1979, Coach House was on a roll. With a backlist of sixty-five titles and a front list of fifteen, it had outgrown the definition of small press. We began cautiously to celebrate what we were doing, and our writers began to get some serious ink. Our books were nominated or winning Governor General's Awards almost every year" ("Heady Fumes" 50). In this context, parodic gestures became a way for the editors to engage with and encourage success while publicly pronouncing the press's continued sincerity to the avant-garde. Sheard describes some of the first promotional activities in which she was involved: "I think it was bpNichol's suggestion at one of these bacchanals [editorial meetings] to take out ads in *Saturday Night* personals as though books themselves were lonely singles. Stan, I think, encouraged us to crash the Antiquarian Book Fair on a pie wagon -- a peddled vehicle we mounted with display racks for mobile curbside importuning." Sheard and Clifford James continued to use the book-cycle, peddling it around Toronto to distribute posters and orders. The press also threw, as Sheard notes, "oddball" launches and cocktail parties in its yard, with books strung from the trees above like fruit ("Heady Fumes" 50).

Other promotional efforts such as the *Coach House Newsletter* and its annual literary entertainment were designed to promote the press and its authors collectively rather than individual titles, a strategy, Davey notes, preferred especially by him and bpNichol ("Beginnings of an End" 46). The idea of collective promotion is in itself an arm's length engagement with mainstream publishing strategies, a kind of doing it but not really doing it. The specific strategies themselves made fun of the press's involvement in trying to expand its readership. In its first newsletter (February 1977), the press offered bookstores, libraries, and other customers "a special 3-hole ring-binder, embossed with the Coach House logo, in which to collect the newsletter" (1), yet at the same reminded its readers that it was an "instrument of literary renewal, publishing new forms and language uses as alternatives to the inevitable conformities, conventions, and soon-to-be-clichés of the academically popular and commercially successful" (1). Coach House's "annual" literary event which ran only for two years ("The Big Sonnet" in December of 1977 and "Revenge of the Big Sonnet" in December of 1978) was, as Katherine Gilday describes in the *Globe and Mail*, "Coach House Press's annual parody-celebration of its unique identity in the publishing world" (x). Billing themselves as "the largest most extravagant literary event ever to be held in Toronto," the Big Sonnets were modelled after the variety show and could not "be taken too seriously" ("Poets' Revenge" 33), even though the press sold books at these events at a discount of 50% and gave them away free to those reluctant to purchase them.

Sheard sums up promotion at Coach House from 1978 until the late 80s as "Zen marketing, the illusion of marketing through the energetically imaginative spreading of rumour, which was about all we could afford -- marketing you needed special X-ray glasses to see" ("Heady Fumes" 50). Yet the minutes of the 1979-80 period reveal that

the press was simultaneously engaging in very traditional forms of promotion.[15] Under the heading "Promotion -- new directions for 1979/80," the minutes of the May 31, 1979 meeting state:

> A major shift in emphasis for the forthcoming year was outlined. It was suggested that after Newsletter #8 appear, all further money be re-directed into a regular series of ads. These ads would appear in *Books in Canada*, *Quill and Quire*, and back cover exchange ads in *Canadian Forum*. These regular, small ads would be standardized as much as possible, with a continuing storyline or theme, regular author photo, etc. It was agreed to stress a single title per ad, rather than a group. (1)

A document entitled "Coach House Promotional Plan -- September, 1979 - June, 1980," written by David Young, also emphasizes a change in attitude toward promotion: "Promotion of CHP titles has too often been an afterthought, a quasi-volunteer activity shoe-horned into a maze of conflicting jobwork. By setting aside a special budget for promotional personnel we will make it worthwhile for Clifford and Sarah to put in the extra hours this work deserves." The budget came from the annual interest of the sale of Coach House's archives ($3,000), and Sheard and James were paid at a rate of $5/hour to do the work. Young included a list of activities covered by the special budget: writing announcements, press releases, and special mailings for new titles; organizing special promotions to coincide with conferences, reading tours, and visiting authors; preparing "other title" listings in the back of Coach House books; scheduling paid advertisements in print media; and making personal visits to reviewers and bookstores (1).

The new investment in promotion also directly affected how some of its books were published. In a letter to George Bowering, Sheard describes "an intriguing idea" which the editorial collective came up with for the *Contemporary Canadian Poetry Anthology* that Bowering was editing. The board decided to publish the first 500 copies of the anthology in a four-volume edition with each volume containing the work of three or four of the contributors. The volumes were to be sold separately or by the set and priced to encourage purchase of the set. Sheard gave the reason for the idea:

> Initially, five hundred copies of each volume would be published to 'whet the market' and once that was accomplished, we'd bring out the combined, single volume edition.
>
> We feel that by bringing out the first edition in the series in this

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[15] All of the existing minutes of this period deal with promotion to some degree, and in some cases make up half or more than half of their contents. Unfortunately I have been unable to trace changes in promotional practices and attitudes beyond 1980 because the third accession of Coach House materials at the National Library, covering the 1981-89 period, are currently unavailable. While the Library has these materials, it has not yet organized them, and thus they remain unavailable to the public.

> way, we'd allow teachers and individuals the freedom to tailor their own studies and provide a real incentive to add the books to curricula. Bookstores will find the edition more attractive, as well.

Following a description of how the royalties would work, Sheard writes, "I hope this doesn't sound too dizzying. It's just our latest effort in aggressive 'whet' marketing."[16]

In the late 70s and the 80s, Coach House published other anthologies, such as Michael Ondaatje's *Long Poem Anthology* (1979), Bowering's *Fiction of Contemporary Canada* (1980), *Quebec Voices: Three Plays* (1986), and *The Swift Current Anthology* (1986). These books, as Davey notes, were attempts to place its authors into "the culturally legitimating format of a textbook" and its editors into "a canon-making role" and to promote the press's "educational and cultural importance" ("Beginnings" 48). Not only did the move to anthology publishing mark a shift in the press's notion of cultural activism but in its attitude to sales as well. As Davey notes, "An added promotional advantage of such anthologies was that their potential for high school and first-year university adoption could lead to the sale of our single-author collections to universities for graduate and senior undergraduate courses" (48). The press also published other texts designed for various levels of the school system: *The Work: Conversations with English-Canadian Playwrights* (1981), *The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library: a Brief Guide to the Collection* (1982, republished in 1988), and *The Dream Class Anthology: Writings from Toronto High Schools* (1983).

In outlining some of the traditional promotional efforts of Coach House, I do not mean to over-emphasize the role they came to play for the press but to show how its efforts were more sustained, serious, and typical of other publishers than Sheard's "Zen marketing" comment suggests. Even Frank Davey, who otherwise disagrees with much of Sheard's article in his own "The Beginnings of an End of Coach House Press," particularly her portrayal of the press as male dominated (74, ftn. 1), takes for granted at least this one comment of Sheard's (50). Their desire to present and interpret promotion at Coach House during this period as Zen-like, even after the fact, reveals both the importance of economic disavowal for the avant-garde position and the difficulties in sustaining it practically in the face of consecration: being too successful at disseminating its books meant Coach House would compromise its avant-garde status but being completely unsuccessful at promotion was equally untenable for a press with growing overheads and a growing sense of responsibility to itself, its authors, and its readers.

For Sheard, Zen marketing typified the press's overall "quirkiness" in the second editorial period which in turn generated editorial solidarity. She remarks on "[t]he acute and enduring pleasure our company gave to one another and how "[i]t was this that warmed all of us, participation in a conversation that was to span decades" ("Heady Fumes" 54). Davey, in contrast, depicts the second period as increasingly divided. In his view, while the collective had been unified from 1975-80 through the general ideological

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[16] The *Contemporary Canadian Poetry Anthology* was published in four volumes in 1983 and then in one volume in 1984.

attitude represented by Coleman, after 1980, the aesthetic/political positions of the same editors began to shift. Tensions emerged over the perceived domination of the press's profile by certain members when Sheard (who became an editor in 1982) and David Young accused Davey and Nichol of dominating the press because they had been editing more than two books per year by taking over other editor's unused quotas (Davey, "Beginnings" 53, 41). They also arose over approaches to promotion:

> As the 1980s unfolded, there became increased tension on the board between those like myself who wished to use means like [anthology publishing] to promote the press and thus promote the kind of books the editors themselves valued, and those that wished to find at least a few manuscripts that could make money for the press if promoted and commodified by mainstream advertising methods. ("Beginnings" 50)

If promotion remained untraditional for Davey, it was because those editors who wished to publish a couple of more mainstream titles a year (Sheard included) were unsuccessful in finding these manuscripts and because, for him, anthology publishing was not typical of small presses when Coach House began doing it. "Small presses in Canada," Davey notes, "had to this time only rarely attempted to influence the legitimation of their own authors by publishing anthologies or criticism." He further disassociates Coach House's anthologies from mainstream advertising methods by drawing a line of continuity between them and Coleman and Bevington's efforts to publicize Coach House through lavish posters for books such as Ondaatje's *Rat Jelly* (1973) and Cohen's *Peach Melba* (1974) ("Beginnings" 48, 46). These two efforts to legitimize the press, posters and anthologies, could, however, just as easily be interpreted as incompatible. Not only did they aim for different markets, bookstore sales versus university course adoption, but anthology publishing was also characteristic of large publishers. Certainly, Coleman read Coach House's move into anthology publishing as anti-avant-garde as his disparaging description of Davey as "a canon feeder" suggests -- a description made all the more disparaging when he compares Davey to the other most active editor of the second editorial period, bpNichol, whom he describes as maintaining "his belief that books of vanguard literature should walk the walk, stay small (if increasingly more marginal), and continue the tradition of outrageous spectacle whenever possible" ("Coach House Press" 34). Suggested in Davey's criticism of those who wanted to publish a couple of annual titles which made more money, and in Coleman's condemnation of Davey's own preferred strategy, promotion of the press through anthologies, is the difficulty of ascertaining what exactly constitutes the maintenance or infringement of the avant-garde position.

The tensions in the second editorial period remained manageable because the press still had the printing side generating revenue. As Frank Davey wrote to Brian Fawcett in an email on December 23, 1986: "I suspect however that the opposite situation to that feared by Victor has probably prevailed most years -- i.e. that Stan's printing business has been subsidizing the publishing side & allowing us eds the privilege

of anything we damn well felt like despite its cost or limited sales potential. I think Stan liked publishing books so much that he never questioned this practice" (n. pag.). The one available figure in the second accession of the Coach House Press papers confirms Davey's suspicion. A position paper to Canada Council in 1980 outlines that in the previous year the press had a total cash flow of $240,000 with $42,650 coming from government grants, approximately $59,000 from book sales, and the remainder from "selling the many in-house resources and service of our printing operation to outsiders -- other small presses, art galleries, university publications, and private individuals" (n. pag.). Whether or not this situation held true for other years, or even most years, the point is that no one but Bevington had had access to financial records, so the editors had been working in an idealistic vacuum of financial non-concern.

The event which inspired Davey's note to Fawcett was the restructuring of Coach House, announced in late 1986 and made official in early 1987. For twenty years, Bevington had had full financial control over both the publishing and printing sides of Coach House. However, an official memorandum dated November 20 to the editorial collective from Valerie Frith, former editor of *Quill & Quire* and still at that point the Literature Officer at the Ontario Arts Council, announced that "as of January 1st, 1987, Coach House Press as we know it will become two companies: CHP (Publishing) and CHP (Printing)" (1). In fact, Bevington had legally separated the two business in 1974; however, he had continued to operate them as if they were virtually one company, mixing payrolls, revenues, loans, and grant money. While this approach had worked for years, at least well enough to continue publishing, by 1986 Bevington's overall finances became so tenuous that his health was affected; a series of life-threatening asthma attacks required his hospitalization. The solution was to divide the company (legally and in practice) and set up the publishing house as a non-profit corporation which would resemble "in all significant respects the sort of non-profit operation we are all accustomed to seeing in the arts." Frith explained further that "Stan's role as sole proprietor will be assumed by a Management Committee of three members, initially Stan, David [Young] and I, because we are the group that has been thrashing out this situation for almost a year now." The new structure, Frith continued, was both for "logical" business reasons and for alleviating "the burden of responsibilities Stan currently carries" (1). The news, as Davey describes, not only was a "shock" but made "it brutally clear what a publishing (fool's) paradise the editors -- apart from Stan -- had occupied for the past 11 years" ("Beginnings" 54).

The Last Years: The Corporate Coach House

Initially, the editors[17] were unsure of how the restructuring would affect Coach

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[17] The editors at this point were Bevington, Davey, Linda Davey, Dewdney, McFadden, Nichol, Reid, Sheard, Ondaatje, Robert Wallace, Young, and Coleman who had returned in 1984 when, as Coleman describes, he was approached "separately by

House's mandate or their roles at the press, or even if it would have any impact at all. The minutes of the editorial meeting held five days later, on November 25th, are remarkably business as usual. Discussion of old business -- an OAC reserve allocation to use by the end of February, an up-date on sales figures (the press was ahead of its estimated sales for the year), a form letter for turning back unsolicited writing, books to be reprinted with new covers, a January newsletter and February catalogue -- take up over half of the minutes. The discussion of a letter to be sent to authors informing them of why the press was re-organizing and what effect it would have on them is the only place the restructuring is discussed at all (on paper at least; the minutes began "It was a long and lengthy meeting," though the minutes themselves are just over two pages long). In fact, the minutes suggest that there was some enthusiasm for change amongst the collective. Even Davey, who would soon become one of the persons most critical of the restructuring, initially saw it as an opportunity to improve the press: "Frank said he would like to tell people with some confidence that things will get better around here. He sees three big problems with Coach House as it is: 1. We don't get books out on time, 2. We don't pay royalties on time, and 3. Our distribution seems inadequate" (n. pag.).

To account for the lack of panic at this point, Davey has recently recalled that the restructuring of the press was presented to the editors at this meeting as "essentially benign" ("Beginning" 55). Yet, both Frith's November 20 memorandum and the November 25 minutes already suggest that Frith intended a more comprehensive re-working of old practices. While her memorandum was meant to be reassuring, foregrounding consultation and consensus ("Please," she wrote, "expect to be consulted regularly during this period. If the new company is to succeed, everyone who has nurtured the press in the past -- editors and staff -- must feel comfortable with the shape it is taking" [2]), she had already presented one change, beyond the one that the press would be run by a management committee, as if it were a given: "Heretofore, publishing decisions have been made without the editors' being informed of the financial implications attendant to them. During the early months of 1987, we will begin to re-order the vast data resources available here so that the editors will be able to see the impact of each publishing decision" (1). By appending an analysis of the sales figures for Coach House's backlist and interpreting the results as a "problematic . . . imbalance whereby 11% of the titles on the backlist produce 75% of the sales," she clearly discloses her expectation that the editors would quickly learn to rethink the kinds of books they had been publishing. The minutes also equally expose how Frith already had bigger plans in mind. On the subject of the authors' letter, they state: "It must also introduce Val and Leonard as the two new faces on the scene, while being clear about the fact that in terms of the board and the production staff, everything remains much the same. Val also suggested that the letter speak more directly to the reader as an individual, and that it sound reassuring without making false promises" (n. pag.). Frith's ominous interjection

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Nichol, Ondaatje and Young to rejoin the team, because, as David Young pointed out, there was a distinct lack of energy to keep things going in the face of ever-diminishing returns" ("Coach House Press" 33).

that the letter "sound reassuring without making false promises" contradicts the statement that "everything remains much the same."

In her memorandum, Frith promised that by the end of April she would present the editors with a report "recommending how the full range of publishing decisions should be made in the future" (2). The minutes of the meetings from December through to the appearance of the report on March 30, a month earlier than projected, are, like those of November 25, business as usual. Only one small, light-hearted reminder of the changes underfoot appears in the March 5 minutes: "By the way, the split is now official, legal, and in effect. A publishing bank account now exists and will likely be overdrawn in no time" (n. pag). However, an email Davey wrote to George Bowering about the December meeting reveals that some tensions were emerging amongst the editors:

> David Young (& Sarah Sheard) are already talking like young Tories -- "bottom line," "real world" and abt the need to produce books to meet the needs of a new "market reality." They may have merely picked up a discourse from the current right-wing small-business fashionability, & not have radically changed their thinking about what books they'd like to see printed, but I don't trust anyone who talks that way. Dennis Reid seems sympathetic to their point of view, and Valerie; Dennis is a very cautious, scholarly person, also very humane, and sees a new fiscally-responsible direction as important because it would be best for Stan's health. Valerie is a dreamy liberal idealist, who thinks that if chp can only have a good plan, and good spread sheets, the world will unfold as it should. Michael O. can't figure out what all the fuss is about -- he keeps saying that he just plans on editing the same kind of books he's always edited, as if he doesn't hear Valerie saying everything about the press must be open to reconsideration and David Y. saying that we can't go publishing the books we have, that our past years have been disasters. bp & I can see that our preference to keep publishing the kind of books we have been publishing will very likely conflict with DY's determination to change the direction of the press toward more saleable titles, or at the very least cause our colleagues -- Stan, Val, DY -- to lose their own money in paying the press's bills. Linda feels there's been a bit of a power-play, probably an unconscious one, in as much as the details that have been arranged legally have been kept from most of the eds, & they've been asked to give tacit approval to a plan they know very little about. (Dec. 25, 1986)

With respect to his own quotation of this email in "The Beginnings of an End of Coach House press," Davey emphasizes how it was not necessarily a version of what was happening but what he was coming to believe was happening (55). Yet, while it names no names, Frith's report confirms the differences of opinion among the editors when it came to commercialism. Having interviewed all the editors and at least some of the

production staff in order to formulate her recommendations, Frith introduces her findings, "The only shared element among professionalism's sundry attributes was some relationship to sales, which then made it desirable to some and uncongenial to others" (n. pag.). In other areas of the report, she emphasized again that the press was "a loose aggregate of individuals whose commitment to it derives from its accommodating each person's own goals rather than from making common cause with the rest of the group" (4) and that there was "very little common understanding in this group" (n. pag.).

Like the 1974-75 transition, the one of 1986-87 became fraught with tension. In many ways, it was even worse. At least in the first transition, Coleman had left the press instead of staying to fight for changes, and the editors who had taken over Coach House shared similar goals. The second transition, however, involved many more people with differing viewpoints who all chose to stay and work things out. Also, as Frith had noted, they all exhibited, in spite of their differences, a "high level of loyalty and emotional attachment to the press" (4). While, of course, new technology played no role in the second transition, what it had represented to Coleman -- a threat to non-commercialism and editorial autonomy -- again became the primary issues of contention. This time, however, the threat was real. The report's 23 recommendations, which addressed areas of acquisitions, production, and promotion, as well as the overall goals of the press, sought to make the press a more professional organization. Frith had carefully defined "professionalism" in her introduction as "guessing how many copies will sell and being right": "If your most honest and ambitious prediction is that 300 readers are out there, and you do, in fact, sell that many, then you are professional" (1), and most of her recommendations were passed. The new press would have a board of directors and an editorial board, with no members sitting on both boards. As Frith outlined, the old system allowed for several essential "publisher-functions" to be ignored -- financial responsibility, detailed market identification, and maintaining an overview of the company's affairs (4). Under the new system, the board of directors would manage these details, while the editors would assume responsibility for individual titles. Frith did recommend (and it was passed) that the editors still choose some books unilaterally, so in some senses preserving their previous roles (Frith felt a system of consensus would likely make the press less innovative and experimental). Nonetheless, the new system differed fundamentally from the old by making the editors accountable to another body.

The issue of non-commercialism did not arise in the place where it might have been expected to -- discussion of a new "draughthorse line," defined as longer-run books with a 2,000-copy frontlist sales and strong backlist potential (anticipated to eventually make up 6 out of 16 annual titles) which would subsidize riskier titles and which the directors would be responsible for finding (5). This recommendation was passed, though Davey has indicated, not nearly as smoothly as the minutes indicate.[18] Neither did the

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[18] As Davey comments with respect to the draughthorses, "[T]he rather cheerfully written minutes did not represent the level of distress and conflict in the room" ("Beginnings" 58). Overall, the minutes do present the meeting as if the editors acted like a cheerful, unified group, keen on change at the press, beginning "We all cheered Val for a

issue of editorial autonomy come up in the place that seems most obvious -- the division of the board into editors and directors. Instead, both were displaced to the make-up and functioning of the editorial board itself. Unable to resolve how the new editorial board would operate at the March 30 meeting, the editors agreed to submit written proposals before the next meeting. The primary issue in these proposals was the addition of new editors -- how to choose and integrate them smoothly into what was an already large board. The desire for "new blood" for some (namely, Ondaatje, Sheard and Young) was rooted in the view that Coach House was a closed shop which needed to be opened up to new constituencies, namely women and younger editors. Ondaatje wrote in his two page report:

> I think that just as we moved from Victor to the present board, it is definitely time to open ourselves to something fresher. The average age is getting up there. While I don't think that age necessarily equals freshness, I think we have got locked into a belief that we are the only one who can run the press.
>
> We are of roughly the same age, mostly male, and we pretty well all come from a specific aesthetic (anti-Beissell [sic], Jonal, Skelton). We are also all part of the status quo. The moment any real change is suggested with the press (even if it would be economic suicide not to change) we bring out the sacred texts and find reasons why we should remain exactly as we are or we threaten to pick up our marbles and go home. (n. pag.)

The male-dominated board meant that Coach House's avant-garde aesthetics had been biased toward male authors in both the first and second period. Particularly, in its first

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wonderful job done" and closing "Good Meeting!" They do, however, express at least *some* tension about the draughthorse line. Under the heading "Of bad poets and whores: acquisitions," the minutes state: "When a collection of ideas for draughthorse books is gathered, the board will discuss which would be the best choices for our list. Thus, the eds need not fear being embarrassed by an unholy title they would never have chosen themselves. (Similarly, the discussion of individual choices made by editors may prevent embarrassment: sarah pointed out that certain literary titles have made us all blush)" (n.p.). An email Davey wrote to Bowering that night provides a fuller picture of this discussion: "It's not clear what these new titles [the draughthorses] will be, although DY assured Mike that they wd not embarrass the press, at wch Sarah proclaimed that many short-run literary titles of the past had been embarrassing to her, and Dennis Reid observed that some found it more embarrassing to be whores than bad poets" (qtd. in "Beginnings" 58). While the minutes certainly allude to this discussion, they not only tone down what Davey indicates was a far more heated discussion, but suggest further that the editors were rethinking their unilateral decision-making power by offering to discuss individual choices with the group.

editorial period, the press published very few books by women: of the approximately 90 titles it published from 1965 to 1974, only 9 were by women. In its second period, the representation of women writers increased somewhat, averaging two to four books by women out of an annual list of approximately 15 with a couple of anomalous years when the numbers were higher; for instance, there were eight titles by women published in 1983 and five in 1985. Ondaatje also underscores how the editors had lost their subversive status. The incomprehensible which had formed its cultural capital in the past had over its second editorial period become increasingly comprehensible to a larger, middle-class readership. The press's own efforts at anthology publishing had helped expand the literacy for their avant-garde aesthetics to this readership. The once radical press was now aligned with dominant ideology on at least two fronts: gender and literacy.

The scepticism of new blood by other editors (namely, Linda Davey, Davey, and Nichol) was grounded in the view that new members would water down the current editors' impact on Coach House's list, thus changing the overall literary programme of the press even more than the draughthorse line already threatened to. As Nichol warned, "There are lots of generalist literary presses in Canada with mainstream aspirations. There remains, for all its flaws and imperfections (and perhaps even because of them), only one Coach House Press and only one publishing program like the one it has pursued" (4). Although new blood does not necessarily signify generalism -- it could in fact, as Ondaatje suggested, make the press less status quo -- the editors opposed to opening up the editorial board equated new editors with mainstreaming Coach House, particularly since they perceived the people supporting new blood to be keen on commercializing the press. While the editors for change focussed their efforts on devising a new rotation system (with years on and off the board to make space for both old and new editors), including detailed charts of proposed models, the editors against change focussed on the need to articulate a clear mandate for the press in its next phase before any changes were made.

Finally, in May, the editors arrived at a new editorial structure. The editorial board was divided into two bodies, an advisory board which would be comprised mainly of new members and whose primary functions would be to submit manuscripts to the editors and act as their assistants on a voluntary basis, and the editorial board which would be veterans and whose role it would be to decide on the proposed manuscripts (Martin, Report on New Editorial Structure, n. pag.). The mandate, it appears, was never discussed. In retrospect, Davey describes the new editorial structure "as a kind of stalemate that was resolved by events, as much as by anything, and tilted toward the reform position" ("Beginnings" 63). The "events" were the increased commercialization of the press through the draughthorse line, including the international program established by Alberto Manguel in 1992 which published authors such as Marguerite Duras and Julio Cortazar, who, while not popular, were of repute, and the addition of new editors who did not represent the aesthetics which previously held the collective together but instead more dominant tastes. They also entailed distribution deals with McClelland & Stewart for the trade and college market in Canada and InBook in the

United States, as well as hiring New York publicist Ira Silverberg to promote Coach House books in America (Anderson 8). However, as Davey's comment implies, if the "reformers" won, it was less that they were more powerful than that their views were more in keeping with Frith's conception of the press as more professional -- a definition of professionalism which had less to do with predicting a readership of 300 and selling that number of books and more to do with the draughthorses she recommended and which represented an agenda she was already pushing, as I have suggested above, before the process of restructuring even began. What the events of 1986-87 reveal -- from the delayed reaction of the editors to the significance of the news that Coach House Publishing and Printing were splitting (as they waited for Frith's report), to their focus on the problem of restructuring the editorial board -- is the essential powerlessness of the collective which had previously run the whole show. While Frith emphasized that she was the editors' "trusty consultant" (Report 12), she was finally "management," who certainly took the workers' views into account, and even to heart at times, but whose idea of a non-profit arts' organization dominated and was enabled by the divisions amongst the collective itself. The previously non-hierarchical press was transformed into a corporatist hierarchy in late 1986, confirmed throughout early 1987, long before it officially became a for-profit corporation under Margaret McClintock in 1992. The board of directors, many drawn from Toronto's business community, increasingly held the power, and the editors both old and new, less and more inclined to mainstream aspirations, were increasingly alienated from the press.[19]

Although Bevington only completely parted company with the publishing house in 1992, the end of Coach House Publishing as a producer which sought to unite the design and content of its books came earlier. Stating that Coach House books "come very dear" and that "lavish best describes their unit production cost" (7), Frith warned in her report:

> The split has to break Coach House of an old habit. As long as Printing and Publishing were one company, Publishing's extravagance was good for the company as a whole. Our spendthrift habits accrued to the benefit of CHP Printing. Now, if the press is to survive, it must determine what its own best interests are, and Printing, as the erstwhile Siamese twin, must assist the new company by working within its budgets. . . . The press is now a customer of CHP Printing, and if any editor believes that a book would be better served by being produced elsewhere, he or she should feel at ease proposing that option. (7-8)

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[19] As Davey describes, "The editorial board met only four or five times, that I was told of, in the 1990-1994 period, and not at all in 1995 or 96." He further remarks, "I would solicit a manuscript, read and appraise it, and recommend it to Margaret, and not hear back from Coach House for a year or two" ("Beginnings" 67-68). The final evidence of the editors' alienation from decision-making in the third period was having no say in the decision to close Coach House. They, like every one else, heard about it after the fact.

Though Frith valued the editors' commitment to design and felt the new press should continue to invest disproportionately in it -- as she noted, design was the only common element among all the versions of Coach House she received from the editors -- she, nonetheless, summed up Coach House's design tradition as producing "good-looking" books (7), boding of how in the last period the press produced merely the "beautiful books" reminiscent now not just of large publishers but of many smaller publishers as well.[20]

Some of the Coach House's most faithful authors, editors, and readers grew sceptical of the press in its last period: Stan Dragland's 1990 fear that "the press seems about to enter a new phase . . . more professional, less quirky" (84), George Bowering's 1991 lament for the good old days throughout his "Random Access Coach House," Davey's comment to me in 1995 that "Now when you publish with Coach House Press you position yourself in a fashionable international avant-garde that's not too 'avant' anymore" (personal interview), and Doug Barbour's recent admission that he didn't keep up with Coach House after 1988 and bpNichol's death (22). Yet, overall, the press continued to be dubbed avant-garde. What maintained the press's association with the avant-garde in its final period? Part of the answer lies in its mixed list and how some of its veteran editors stayed on the board. Also, reputations take a while to die, particularly a larger-than-life reputation like Coach House's which was created by its outrageous spectacles in its first period and its parodic gestures in the second, both continually evoked in articles after the periods actually ended. A remark by Val Ross in her article announcing the press's death is telling of how, for many outsiders, the second editorial period never actually ended: "Two years ago, shortly after Ondaatje won the Booker Prize for his novel *The English Patient*, a report from the *Village Voice* inquired about doing a feature on the company as the last of North America's editor-driven publishing house. The story was never written, but indicates how remarkable others found Coach House's content-oriented focus in an era of book dumps and bottom lines" ("Coach House Closes Doors" A10). Although the press was management-driven by this point, it was not perceived as such by the *Village Voice* or Ross. The tradition of including the editor's name on his/her editorial choices throughout its last years no doubt helped keep up the appearance of an editor-driven and content-oriented press. While not the writer's press it had been in its first decade, the second editorial period was still admired for

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[20] Frith's report indicates that some of the editors felt that design had already become less important over the second editorial period, focussing too much on book covers and not enough on book interiors: "Many editors are very concerned, however, about the lack of a comprehensive approach to design, one that embraces each book's cover and contents equally and distinctively. Interior design was considered too ad hoc and hence conducive to a house style that has made the books' interiors increasingly homogeneous over the years" (8). Though not explicitly tied to the writer's role at the press, a later comment suggests a simultaneous decrease in the author's involvement in the production of his/her books: "Most editors feel that the writer's influence at the Coach House has waned and that the benefits of the relationship are illusory" (11).

being different enough from the rest of the field.

Conclusion

Since Coach House shut its doors on July 12, 1996, amidst cries of outrage from Canada's cultural community, a rhetoric of blame has infused accounts of the press's demise. The first fingers were pointed at the Ontario and federal governments. Media coverage of the cataclysmic literary event emphasized how Coach House was "the most serious casualty to date of recent cuts to federal and provincial grants" (Ross "Coach House Closes Doors" A9) and how "the government that created the programs to bring presses such as Coach House into existence has decided to starve them to death" (Redhill). Publishing leaders such as Anna Porter of Key Porter Books and Louise Dennys of Knopf Canada as well as major writers such as Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje were quoted in convenient sound-bites to help point the finger at the government and to turn Coach House's closure into a symbol of the decline of the Canadian publishing industry and Canadian culture. Ontario Premier Mike Harris made it all too easy for the government to be the initial scapegoat. His inflammatory comment to reporters -- "if they [Coach House] can't compete in the marketplace that probably speaks to their management capabilities" -- left "publishers sputtering with rage" (MacDonald 46). It left academics and writers equally enraged, as anyone reading the Canadian Literature discussion group on the Internet at the time can attest.

In his editorial to *Open Letter*'s special issue on Coach House Press, Frank Davey usefully complicates how the government participated in the press's death. To understand the government's role in Coach House's closure, Davey suggests, means looking at government policy in the years leading up to the serious cutbacks of 1995 and not just at the cutbacks themselves:

> It [Coach House's closure] was not the direct interference of legislators who from time to time may attack individual projects, or even the indirectly damaging actions of legislators who, from time to time, irrationally reduce cultural funding in parallel with more considered reductions to funding in other areas of government. It was the over-extension of debt that governments encouraged by offering abruptly cancellable loan guarantee programs and extra marketing grants as rewards for temporarily inflated sales. (8)

Karl Siegler, publisher of Talonbooks, draws a similar conclusion in his article in the same issue. After 1986, he notes, funding to the publishing industry became business based rather than culture based with publishers having to demonstrate increased sales and profitability year over year in order to qualify for grants. "Having enticed the publishers," Siegler continues, "to enter into expansion and marketing plans well beyond the limits of diminishing returns, and take on huge, government-sponsored debtloads,

something they never would have done without the existence of these government programs, they cut the publishers off at the knees without warning" (96). The picture both Davey and Siegler paint of the government is even more insidious than the one initially painted by the media.

The government has certainly remained a focus in discussions of the press's death. But as Coach House members and authors have begun to voice their interpretations of when and where things went wrong for the press, they have looked inward to significant turning points in the press's history linked to particular members of the press. Coleman has emphasized two moments -- his departure from the press in 1974 and bpNichol's death in 1988 ("The Coach House Press" 33, 34); both Stan Dragland and Douglas Barbour also point to the death of Nichol as marking the end of the press (89; 22). While Davey's introduction to *Open Letter* focuses on the government, his article in that issue tells a different story. In a series of spectacular rhetorical gestures, Davey comes to focus on one individual for explaining Coach House's demise -- Sarah Sheard. Of course, David Young's name crops up, as does Valerie Frith's. Even the editors most strongly invested in the old spirit of Coach House, namely Davey himself and bpNichol, take some of the heat. Their own tendency, for instance, "to 'bankers are bad' oversimplifications, made it easy for centre-right voices like Sheard to ridicule or parody" ("Beginnings" 52). Nonetheless, throughout Davey's version of events, Sheard remains, as in the quotation just cited, the most responsible for destroying Coach House. Davey opens his article with a description of the original trauma -- the moment in 1982 when Sheard became a board member -- and then revisits the scene of the traumatic event through descriptions of Sheard's apparent homophobia, charges of sexism, and capitulation to power structures which equated success with money. While for Davey Coach House ended in the early eighties, for Sheard the end came somewhat later with its removal from the old coach house:

> The press did eventually outgrow its crib. The editors and Margaret McClintock struck out on their own, and by the time I left the collective, Coach House Publishing was putting out around twenty titles a year, much more professionally now in snazzy new upscale digs with terminals on every desk and broadloom and a watercooler and voice mail and a sales force, but it wasn't as much fun. bpNichol and Greg Curnoe had died, Roy Kiyooka and Daphne Marlatt had spilt up. David Young had defected to stage and screen. Michael Ondaatje was famous now and travelling a lot. (56)

Sheard's description personalizes Bourdieu's account of how avant-garde producers typically "grow old," that is, the trajectory from the young avant-garde to the consecreted avant-garde. Her emphasis on "fun" highlights how aging is not just the product of economic forces but of individual investments and commitments.

There is no doubt that by its closure in 1996 Coach House Press was walking in the shadow of its former self, though the various interpretations of the end of Coach

House suggest the impossibility of defining the moment the press no longer was what it should have been. The latest incarnation of Coach House as Coach House Books, however, has helped invest the first decade of the press as its most valued configuration as an avant-garde producer. Publishing books online and offering short-run, high-quality printed copies to its customers, Coach House Books capitalizes on both the liberatory rhetoric of the Internet and the reputation of Coach House's first decade to proclaim its avant-gardism. Back in its old coach house off of Huron Street under the guidance of Stan Bevington, it invites people to "[d]rop by and find out more about both brand new and more traditional publishing with onsite web access to chbooks.com and the multimedia Immedia projects; and experience that museum moment with the legendary Gordon Challenge press, our ancient Mergenthalen Linotype machine and two Heidelburg offset printing presses." By echoing the first editorial period of Coach House Press, Coach House Books seeks to erase its second and third editorial periods and to sustain the myth of Coach House as Canada's pre-eminent small avant-garde producer.

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NEWEST PRESS: THE ACADEMIC COTERIE

You might remember my letter in the winter expressing NeWest Press's interest in *Jessica*. We are planning an anthology of Four Plays by Women in late 1986 as the seventh in our Prairie Play Series (*Showing West*, 1982 included *The West Show* and *Far as the Eye Can See*; we also published Sharon Pollock's *Blood Relations and Other Plays*). For the new book we have so far acquired plays by Pollock, Joanna Glass and Wendy Lill. My co-editor in the project, Don Kerr of Saskatoon, and I would like very much to see the *Jessica* script. . . . I saw the play last week in Toronto and was very much taken with it, as my review in the *NeWest Review* next month will indicate.

--Letter from Diane Bessai to Linda Griffiths, April 13, 1986

Thank you for your letter and your interest in publishing, 'Jessica'. At the moment, we/re just getting together a readable copy of the script and I'll send one to you as soon as possible. . . . I'm writing to Maria Campbell and including a copy of your letter. Because of distance and time, our communication is slow. . . . So what I'm saying is, yes I'm interested in your proposal, I'm definitely considering it, I need time to think and time to check things out with Maria. I also want you to know that I'm considering at least one other channel of publication.

--Letter from Linda Griffiths to Diane Bessai, n.d.

Maria Campbell and Linda Griffith's play script "Jessica" appeared in print as *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* in 1989. Its publisher was Coach House Press. A collaborative effort by Métis writer and activist Campbell, who provided its subject matter, and white actress/playwright Griffiths, who wrote it, the play embodies one of the most contentious and publicly visible literary debates to emerge in Canada in the 1980s -- appropriation of voice. It quickly garnered the attention of reviewers, became the subject of a number academic articles, and found its way onto university course lists. To fill in more of the story of NeWest's unsuccessful attempt to acquire "Jessica": as promised, Griffiths had sent NeWest a copy of the script sometime in the summer of 1986, and the press's play editors Diane Bessai and Don Kerr quickly confirmed their interest in including it in *Four Plays By Women*. Although they failed to get the play into their anthology, Bessai in particular remained keen to publish it as part of the Prairie Play Series. Not only did the play reflect her own interest in collective theatre, but it had, in the meantime, won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play and the Chalmers Canadian Play Award. She wrote to Griffiths again in May 1987, "I was able to bring a proposal to the Board yesterday, which they accepted with enthusiasm, that we publish a single-volume, well-illustrated edition of Jessica in 1988. I hope this is not too late (ie that the play is still available)" (1). She added: "Although we've been going for anthologies lately for practical reasons (ie price of books), the idea of making an exception in this case caused no problems because of the reputation of the play, its subject matter and the hint of pictorial possibilities as well from the one pic I have from last year's production" (1). Aware of the competition posed by the "other channel of publication," she further attempted to entice the authors, especially Griffiths, to decide in favour of NeWest. She informed Griffiths that Kerr, whom the playwright knew from her days at

Saskatoon's 25th Street Theatre and had called in an earlier letter "one of the most articulate and clearly political people involved in the arts right now" (n.d.), would be the chief editor to work with her on revising the script for publication "because you know him and like his work" (1). By the end of August, Griffiths informed Bessai that she had decided to go with Coach House and Bob Wallace as editor: "Both Maria and I feel that they have reasonable distribution, also accessibility to where I live at the moment is an asset. . . . Although I don't often admit it, I live in Toronto" (Aug. 24, 1987).[1]

Although Frank Davey has claimed definitively -- to say nothing of ironically given his own involvement with Coach House -- that by the end of the 1980s regional as well as other minority interests had "rendered irrelevant" any notion of a national literary canon and any progressive concept of the avant-garde (40-41), these details of "Jessica"'s publication open the question of how successful the regional press movement has been in transforming literary power in Canada. As the authors' decision in favour of Coach House suggests, the attractions of a central location can override other, even preferred, literary and ideological affiliations. While Toronto small presses may not have the resources of their near neighbours, large and medium-sized publishers, they nonetheless hold numerous material advantages over their spiritual counterparts in the Canadian hinterlands, including proximity to the largest market for English-Canadian books and access to more "reasonable" systems of distribution. They also claim, as a result of these material conditions, the psychological benefits evoked in Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. Defined as conscious and unconscious predispositions (and often suggestively called "a feel for the game" or "practical sense"), *habitus*, Bourdieu emphasizes, is a product of history: "It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought, action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (*Logic* 53). Toronto's long history as the publishing capital of Canada and trendsetter for the literary tastes of the nation has produced the perception among authors and readers alike that books coming out of the metropolis are inherently of greater value than those emerging from the hinterlands. Regionalism's long association with inferiority and literary regionalism's with political and aesthetic naivety have compounded Toronto's preeminent position in the field of Canadian publishing. Enacting a "self-fulfilling prophecy" where the expectation of success leads to success (Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* 99), the dispositions of *habitus* ensure that authors continue to use the regions as stepping stones, switching to Toronto publishers and/or physically moving

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[1] While Griffiths was born in Montreal and had studied at the National Theatre School, she began her career at 25th Street Theatre in Saskatoon. It was this fact, as well as Campbell's Saskatchewan birth, which made "Jessica," according to Bessai, fit the regionalist mandate of a western press. As Bessai wrote Griffiths, "Your important involvement with 25th Street Theatre and the fact that *Jessica* in its first version was premiered there makes it an attractive and suitable prospect for [*Four Plays by Women*], not to speak of the role Maria Campbell has played in the play's development" (April 13, 1986).

themselves to the centre to be where the action is.

In spite of the lingering vestiges of the metropolitan-hinterland thesis for Canadian publishing, there is little doubt that the regional press movement has made significant gains since it emerged in force in the 1970s. Encouraged by Canada Council project grants and the promise of block grants once they published the requisite number of titles, the regional presses of this decade set out to build, often in virtual absence, the infrastructures necessary to support local publishing and the belief that writing and publishing could flourish in the Canadian hinterlands. Rallying support for their causes through the anti-centrist sentiments fostered by the biases of the Toronto publishing industry toward Ontario writers and the more positive identity politics implicit in regionalism's motto "a sense of place," they contributed, as Susan Walker reported in 1979 in a *Quill & Quire* article "Ten Years that Shook the Trade," "to regional industries that soon had their own trade associations and the power to lobby provincial governments. Led by the Ontario Arts Council's powerful example, by decade's end every province in the country had or was about to announce some form of book trade assistance" (6). They also drew the support of local authors, and not just those who felt they had no other forum for their work but nationally known ones such as Robert Kroetsch who called his publishing *Seed Catalogue* with Turnstone in 1977 "a political act" (qtd. in Daniel 31). The efforts of regional presses were not just recognized by their respective regions but by the centre as well. In 1979, Canada Council formally recognized their contributions to Canadian publishing as well as the difficulties posed by their locations establishing new criteria for its block grant program which included bonuses for regional publishing.[2] Overturning the infamous and disparaging comments of devoted nationalist reviewer E.K. Brown, who in 1943 had warned that regionalism would delay the coming of "great books" because it stressed "the superficial and the peculiar at the expense, at least, if not to the exclusion, of the fundamental and universal"(159-60), critics and industry commentators enthusiastically welcomed the renewed regionalism of the period in national journals and magazines: Ken Norris remarked in *Essays on Canadian Literature* in 1978, "[T]here is much to suggest that [Canadian writing's] greatest truths and greatest insights will be, above all, local & particular" (205); and in the same year Arlene H. McCarthy wrote in *The Canadian Author and Bookman*, "That regional derivation is finally being appreciated rather than criticized is an encouraging development in literary criticism in Canada" (17).

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[2] Rather than basing 100% of a publisher's block grant on numbers of eligible titles published in the previous year, as had previously been the case, beginning in 1979, the Council based 50% of the grant on the numbers of eligible titles published over the two previous years and the other 50% (called "bonus points") on three criteria: regional location, professional ability, and cultural contribution. Because the awarding of block grants now required the input of a panel of jurors to assess a publisher's "success" in these three areas, this change turned the awarding of block grants, as *Quill & Quire* alluded in 1980, into a far more subjective process: "The role of the four-member panel on publishing, instituted for the first time in 1979," it remarked, "has thus been greatly heightened" ("New Rules" 10). This 50-50 formula is still in use today.

Established in 1977, NeWest Press was formed in response not only to the publishing and pro-regionalist trends of the period but to the unique climate of its place -- the economic and political prosperity of the West. "During this decade," George Melynk, NeWest's founder, writes, "a 'New West' was born, which had economic muscle and a political elite willing to assert provincial rights vis-a-vis Ottawa" (*Beyond Alienation* 22). Along with the birth of a "New West" came money for culture and, in comparison to other regions, lots of it. Although Susan Walker's comment that all provinces initiated "some form" of aid to publishers, quoted above, already suggests that provincial aid for arts and culture differed in both kind and degree, George Woodcock has outlined more fully the unevenness of the new support. While no province can rival the efforts of Ontario and the Ontario Arts Council, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba stand as beneficent arts patrons against the rest of the anglophone provinces who, Woodcock stresses, gave money to artists and artistic organizations on an extremely penurious scale (86-87). While Woodcock criticizes Alberta, NeWest's home, for not doing more for its arts community given its vast oil revenues, nevertheless, Alberta Culture, established in the 1970s, was particularly active and generous. Rudy Wiebe, one of the original members of NeWest, recalls how those were the great years for Alberta culture in terms of human energy and resources. "Alberta," he reflects to capture the feeling of excitement and possibility of the times, "was really flying high" (personal interview). In terms of the literary arts, this period saw the creation of both the Writers Guild of Alberta and the Alberta Publishers Association. Within a few years of setting up operation, NeWest began to receive substantial sums of money: its first financial coup came from industrial oil giant Nova Corporation, who in 1979 gave it a three-year grant in the amount of $15,000 annually; and in 1982, in addition to its first Canada Council block grant of $22,000, it received its first block grant of $18,000 from Alberta Culture (Kerr).

If western prosperity materially aided the emergence and growth of a number of small presses, including NeWest, Tree Frog, and Red Deer College Press in Alberta, Turnstone, Four Humours, and Peguis in Manitoba, and Thistledown and Coteau in Saskatchewan, it also fostered a heady confidence. "The real energy of Canadian literature right now is in the west," Robert Enright of Turnstone proclaimed for the *Canadian Forum* in 1978. Enright's comment begins an article by Lorne Daniel, "Prairie Publishing: A Community Grows." While Daniel outlined the activities of all the new western presses, he was particularly interested in Turnstone, NeWest, Thistledown and Coteau, which, he noted, were "by their histories and ambitions, most readily identifiable with the current wave of interest in prairie literature" (31). Prairie writing had claimed the attention of literary critics once before when in the 1920s realism began to replace the popular and historical romance as the dominant mode of fiction. In following decades, the stark realism of western writers such as Frederick Philip Grove, Martha Ostenso, and Sinclair Ross was hailed by many as a sign of the maturation of Canadian literature (Keefer 1351; Ricou 1847). Yet shifts in the Canadian canon away from realism and referentiality in the 60s once again rendered prairie writing politically and aesthetically naive. The new wave of prairie writing of the 70s with which Turnstone, NeWest, Thistledown and Coteau was identified broke with the clichés of blizzards and dust storms

and moved into formal innovation. NeWest did differ, however, from these other presses which were established as poetry presses and only later became more broadly defined literary presses. NeWest, in contrast, due to the eclectic interests of its members, published from the beginning fiction and drama along with poetry, both more traditional and innovative.[3] A year following Daniel's article, it also published Ronnie Tessler's *Crackin' Out*, a book of rodeo photographs, reflecting how it would formally become in 1982 what it remains today: a trade publisher of both literary and non-literary titles.

As Melnyk notes, the new western regionalism of 1970s "was short-lived, lasting but a decade. In the early 1980s it began to dissolve under the pressure of recession and a dismantling of its regional economic infrastructure through bankruptcy and unemployment" (*Beyond Alienation* 22). Nonetheless, NeWest has persisted through these and subsequent changes in the socio-political landscape. It has developed from a press which, while intending to be a *prairie* press, was initially very much tied in terms of sales and authorship to its home province and even home city, Edmonton, to one which has access to distribution systems which reach global markets and which publishes authors from British Columbia and more recently the western North. While its sense of its constituency has expanded beyond the prairies, the press has retained its regional focus, describing itself as a publisher of "literature and non-fiction from western Canada." In this, it again differs from the prairie presses with which it grew up. Coteau, Turnstone, and Thistledown now have national mandates and use the term "Canadian" to describe their interests.[4]

Besides retaining its regional focus, one other factor, the focus of this chapter, has remained constant at NeWest: its close ties to the university system. As the press's current president Doug Barbour reflects, drawing a comparison between the origins of his press and Coach House, NeWest did not begin as a writer's press which published "weird books by mindless acid freaks"; instead, it was begun "by people who supported Canadian Literature as academics" and who wanted to publish "important representational texts of the West" (personal interview). NeWest's continued connection to academia has impacted the press in a number of ways, including what has been, in comparison to Coach House, a far less conflicted attitude to the related issues of money and professionalism. As Bourdieu notes in *Homo Academicus*, university professors who hold an institutionalized form of

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[3] NeWest's first book, *Getting Here*, a collection of short stories edited by Rudy Wiebe, reflects, according to the backcover, this combination of more innovative and traditional writing: "Seven Women Seven Stories / From Traditional to Avant-garde."

[4] These descriptions of NeWest's, Coteau's, Thistledown's, and Turnstone's mandates are taken from the Association of Canadian Publisher's membership list. While Thistledown and Turnstone exclude completely any reference to regionalism and use only the term "Canadian" in their mandates, Coteau describes itself as publishing "Canadian, fiction, poetry, drama, creative nonfiction, and juvenile fiction, with an emphasis on Saskatchewan and Prairie writers. See www.digitalbookworld.com/ACP/members.html.

cultural capital[5] are distinguished by this fact from more heretical (that is, less institutionalized) sectors of the cultural field, especially from freelance writers (as opposed to writers who also belong to the university) (36). Instead, they share a likeness "with senior civil servants" in that they have a "bureaucratic career and a regular income." Bourdieu's emphasis on the bureaucracy of the academic profession explains why Victor Coleman, as we saw in the previous chapter, criticized so vehemently Coach House's increasing dependence on the processes of literary canonization; it also explains why NeWest has accepted throughout its history the need for a professional structure and careful approach to money. In terms of the latter, perhaps Rudy Wiebe sums it up best when he states, "We were always fiscally very conservative. We're a bunch of professors" (personal interview). Conservatism, however, does not mean profit seeking or a rejection of the disavowal of the economy. Bourdieu emphasizes that his parallel between the civil service and academia is only meant to establish a position between the population of professors, taken as whole, and the larger political field. The different faculties "are distributed between the pole of economic and political power and the pole of cultural prestige" with the arts and social sciences faculties closer to the latter end (37). These "subordinate" faculties thus share affinities both with the civil-service-like bureaucracy of the university and with the heretical sectors of the cultural field. Overall, in the case of NeWest, these dual influences have meant a moderated relationship to the disavowal of the economy for which it, nonetheless, has a distinct penchant.

Due to the number of literary academics on NeWest's board, the press has self-consciously been engaged in the processes of canonical revision of the past two decades. Overall, NeWest has grown more attentive to the representation of diversity within the West, a movement which reflects changes in literary theory and approaches to literary regionalism. Although in the past critics writing about regionalism were concerned primarily with articulating the relationship between physical landscape and the psyche of the regional subject in order to validate a regional viewpoint against the hegemonic nationalism of the centre, more recently critics have begun to look at regionalism's relationship to, and often erasure of, other subjectivities such as race, ethnicity, and gender. The recent special issues of *Open Letter* on the de:Scribing Albertas conference, held in Edmonton in 1996, underscore this shift. While guest editor Janice Williamson begins her Introduction in the old characteristic way of regionalism -- "Alberta," she writes, "from the point of view of the 'centre' is invisible"-- both her Introduction and the articles included in the volumes focus not on finding ways to become visible to the centre but on rethinking how other categories of identity inform the experience of the subject living *inside* the region. If, as Herb Wyile suggests, exploring the internal regional diversity has helped and will continue to help regionalism "emerge from the marginal position it has occupied for most of the twentieth century" (142), NeWest's own involvement in this project has helped make it an important Canadian press. Of course, the degree to which NeWest has been successful in representing "other" voices of the West is

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[5] Bourdieu defines cultural capital as legitimate knowledge which is acquired both informally in the home and formally, that is, institutionally, through the education system.

questionable and is one of the main issues I explore in the second half of this chapter; the first half of this chapter explores the growth of NeWest as a trade press and its relationship to professionalism and economic disavowal.

The Semi-Professional Trade Press

The year 1982 stands as a milestone in the history of NeWest. George Melnyk who had managed the press since its inception left to "seek gainful and honest employment" (Kerr) and passed on both his managerial role to Jack Lewis, who took up the only paid, full-time position, and his shares in the non-profit company to a large group of editors who donated their time to oversee NeWest's directions and choose, edit, and produce the press's books.[6] The new shareholders included a number of people who had already functioned as Melnyk's editorial board and who, as Don Kerr described for the *NeWest Review*, were Melnyk's "friends in the English Department at the University of Alberta": Rudy Wiebe, Diane Bessai, Henry Kreisel, Aritha van Herk, Mort Ross, Shirley Neuman, Doug Barbour, and Robert Kroetsch. A number of new people also joined the press at this time: two more literary academics, Paul Hjartarson and Smaro Kamboureli, as well as political scientist Larry Pratt, sculptor Joe Fafard, freelance writer Myrna Kostash, historian Don Kerr, folk singer Andrea Spalding, architect Trevor Boddy, and graphic designer Jorge Frascara. At the first shareholders' meeting in September, the editors reorganized the company's structure to reflect the increased size and new interests of their board. Besides establishing an executive committee with Diane Bessai as president and Henry Kreisel as vice-president, they divided their editorial board into two: the literary arts board (nicknamed LAB), chaired by Rudy Wiebe and which was responsible for its fiction, poetry, and drama titles, and the general arts board (GAB), which would look after its non-literary titles and whose first chair was Larry Pratt. Picking up the story for the *Globe & Mail*, William French announced, "NeWest which began in 1977 by publishing only fiction, poetry, and plays by Western Canadian authors, is now expanding into non-fiction, with the emphasis on social and political topics and graphic arts."

French was only partially correct in describing the events of 1982 as NeWest's transformation from a literary into a trade press. By this time, NeWest had, in fact, already published more than half a dozen non-fiction titles, including Melnyk's *Radical Regionalism*, John Orell's *Fallen Empires: The Lost Theatres of Edmonton, 1881-1914*, and Caroline Brown, Bill Jones, and Sperling White's *Rain of Death: Acid Rain in Western Canada*. Yet, because the majority of its titles were literary and because the editorial board was composed of academics from the University of Alberta's English Department, many of whom were also writers, the press impressed people as being a purely literary enterprise -- an impression not just shared by outsiders like French but by the original group of NeWest editors as well. While in retrospect Diane Bessai believes

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[6] The two other original shareholders in NeWest, Julia Berry and Sam Gersonowicz, also passed on their shares to the editors at this time (Kerr).

that Melynk, who was an historian by training and interested in the social and political history of the West, was always interested in having a trade press (personal interview), at the time his intentions for NeWest were not entirely clear. While he publicly stated for Lorne Daniel in 1978 that he hoped NeWest would "develop over time into a major literary press, and even a general press" (32), to his editors he downplayed the idea of non-fiction publishing and used the term "belles lettres" to describe NeWest's mandate. By this, Bessai notes, he meant, or at least the editors interpreted him as meaning, literary works and possibly literary non-fiction. If he was, in fact, already interested in publishing general titles, she adds, he did not make a big point of it in order to encourage the involvement of the literary academics he invited to the press and who had specific interests, such as Neuman and Barbour in poetry, Bessai in drama, and Wiebe and Kreisal in fiction.

If Melynk suspected that as a whole his editors would be less than thrilled by the idea of general publishing, his suspicion was confirmed by their reaction to NeWest's first trade venture, *Crackin' Out*. Wiebe recalls that most of the editors only reluctantly agreed to publish it (personal interview). He, for one, did not like the book. While its rodeo theme reflected part of the western experience, its form, which he describes as "all pictures, no text," did not fit his conception of a belles lettres press which "was to give creative expression to this part of the world" and whose audience would be "literate readers interested in their particular world." That the book was production nightmare and financial disaster did not help warm the editors to idea of publishing trade non-fiction. As Neuman recounts, "It became a lesson in everything not to do in trade publishing. It was an expensive first venture because of the photographs, but most of all it was a publication aimed at a single event [a rodeo convention in Edmonton] and the book wasn't ready for the event" (personal interview).

Prior to 1982, NeWest's structure was as amorphous as its mandate. The idea of starting NeWest originated in the fall of 1976 at a party at Diane Bessai's house when Melynk commented that Edmonton really needed a press but that he had no money. Wiebe remarked that he could find enough material in his graduate course in creative writing to put together a collection of stories, and Doug Barbour responded that he would loan Melynk $500 to publish it. *Getting Here*, which included, as Wiebe promised, seven of his students, appeared in 1977.[7] The next few years the press operated in a similar way: people would gather at each others' homes to discuss what books to publish and would loan Melynk money to see them through production. In this period, there was no formal editorial decision-making process: although NeWest editors could not quite select manuscripts unilaterally as Coach House's board did in the second and third editorial periods, they could generally choose a book and go ahead and do it. While choices often

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[7] Although credited with being NeWest's first book, *Getting Here* was the second book to carry the NeWest name. As Bessai discovered years later when looking through a book shelf in Don Kerr's house in Saskatoon, Melnyk had published a book of poems by Tom Wayman, *Beaton Abbot's Got the Contract: An Anthology of Working Poems*, in 1974.

became the source of heated (though, Bessai insists, ultimately playful) debates, the ruling philosophy with respect to book choices was that everyone take turns publishing what they wanted within what was a limited program of three to five titles. By producing the books cheaply, initially on newsprint, Melnyk managed to keep the press afloat and pay back loans in reasonably short order. Bessai describes NeWest's founder as "amazingly practical." He would, for instance, take discounts on printers' errors rather than insist a book be reprinted. If the first books published under the NeWest name reflect more a desire to get books out there than an interest in production value, the press's second book, *As Far as the Eye Can See*, a play by Rudy Wiebe, suggests how many early NeWest books found their market. Edited by Bessai as the first book in the Prairie Play Series, it was immediately put onto English 210, the introductory English course at the University of Alberta. As Bessai recalls, "Now that was the way we sold plays . . . and collections of short stories later." The series'-- and the press's -- first big success, however, was Sharon Pollock's *Blood Relations* which won a Governor General's award in 1981 and became NeWest's strongest backlist title.

Before Melynk departed from NeWest, he wanted to ensure that it had a proper board with some sort of material interest in its future. Making the editors shareholders was his way of guaranteeing that they would make decisions in the financial interest of the press.[8] He also wanted NeWest to continue as a trade press: after the disaster of *Crackin' Out*, he had published four non-fiction titles in 1981. He left a big board with new members from outside the English department. Although what could now be called the old guard had resisted non-fiction publishing, they now appeared ready to accept the press's trade focus: the picture taken of the board at its first meeting on September 18 and 19, 1982, and published in Don Kerr's *NeWest Review* article announcing the changes at the press, presents an enthusiastic and unified group. The minutes of the meeting also indicates that the concept of a trade press had been integrated successfully into NeWest's mandate: while the board agreed to publish three general titles and five literary titles in the coming year, in a gesture of fairness, it determined that if any books had to be taken off the list for financial reasons they would come off the literary side. Perhaps the financial picture of the press helped inspire group cohesion: according to the minutes, between grants, sales, and interest, the press's projected budget for 1983 was $106,500. As Kerr reported, the new shareholders "learned the financial picture of the Press (relatively healthy)." He also waxed romantic for his readers. Comparing the press to the Wiebe family's new 30,000 square foot chateau at Strawberry Creek, just north of Edmonton, which would be used for seminars, writers' retreats, and meetings and "which you still don't believe even when you're standing inside it," he wrote: "The chateau and the NeWest Press and Review take work to build, lots of nails to hammer and words to write or edit or layout, but at the heart of each venture was vision, which remains the deepest point of contact between old and new west."

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[8] The shares were and continue to be largely symbolic: they do not have to be purchased and are worth nothing in monetary terms. Legal safeguards are also in place to protect board members in case of bankruptcy.

As Kerr's use of the Wiebe chateau as a metaphor for the largeness of the vision behind NeWest suggests, unlike the early Coach House, NeWest cared about making an impact beyond the boundaries of its group, and the university became the main site of transfer between the press and its desire to influence a new generation of writers and readers about western writing. While not an academic -- he was a freelance writer and intellectual -- Melynk very much shared the board's desire that the press become a major cultural influence in the West. His own politics derived from what he termed a "leftwing radical regionalism" (*Radical Regionalism* 43). As an indigenous revolutionary ideology which would increase regional consciousness and change the West's relationship with the nation-state, Melynk's radical regionalism encompassed the whole of the West. "NeWest," established first as a review in 1975, next as a press in 1977, and finally as an institute in 1979, was the means by which Melynk sought to disseminate this new regionalist ideology. The influence of Melynk's politics on his dreams for the press is expressed clearly in a letter he wrote to Robert Kroetsch on the issue of "publishing ourselves." Remarking that Aritha van Herk had given him "a hard time" about publishing *A Voice in the Land: Essays by and about Rudy Wiebe*, he wrote to Kroetsch: "I can only plead that the occasional publication of members of the board should not be construed as a vanity number but as an assistance to the Press. If we publish only new writers or minor writers, then the Press can never achieve the status of an important Western Canadian publishing house. The Press needs the Wiebe's, Kroetsch's, van Herk's [sic] to give it profile." Although stemming from a quite different politics -- that is, a literary politics -- Kroetsch's response reveals that the visions of the literary academic and freelance social historian could overlap. "Rudy's book," he wrote, "is important to the whole country, and I'm delighted that we're doing it." He added that his own *Crow Journals* which NeWest published earlier that year "has already suggested new avenues to a number of writers and has opened new possibilities for the people who think and write about our prairie literature."

Overall, Melynk maintained a flexible approach to running the press, revising policies which he supported in order to keep important editors with the press. One such incident occurred in 1980 when he announced that the press would no longer publish any books for which there was insufficient grant support and that the new policy would be applied retroactively to manuscripts which had already been accepted for publication. His decision prompted two editors, Shirley Neuman and Diane Bessai, to resign from the press. While Neuman was immediately frustrated that a book by Helen Rosta, which she had promised to publish, had been pulled from publication, her letter of resignation reflects larger concerns. Overall, she felt the policy placed her in an unprofessional light, an issue she explicitly connected to her position at the university. "Given, she wrote, "that the work of all of us inevitably, if erroneously, becomes identified and confused with our academic work, I find that uncomfortable conflicts of interest have arisen out of recent press policies." Her second concern entailed what she feared was a diminution of the press's "belle-lettristic mandate." The new policy she feared would make publication of new writers more difficult. Neuman's comments underscore Bourdieu's conception of the arts faculty as at once a professional bureaucracy and a faculty dependent on the norms of

the intellectual and artistic fields. While Melnyk did not share Neuman's specific concerns, he did revise his retroactive policy: both editors remained with the press, and Helen Rosta's *In the Blood* was published in 1982.

Although Melnyk made some unpopular decisions, he was held in sincere admiration by the editors. He was, as Bessai describes, "wonderfully able to take up causes [and] to gather people around him" (personal interview). The editors did not share the same unanimous enthusiasm for the press's next manager, Jack Lewis, whose position at the press was, of course, very different than Melnyk's had been. Unlike NeWest's founder, Lewis was very much an employee of the press with the board members as his bosses. The members of the press who I interviewed reflect a wide range of attitudes to Lewis's capabilities as a manager. Perhaps because Lewis was one of the main reasons she left the press in 1987 (the other reason was her growing responsibilities at the University of Alberta), Neuman is clearest on the subject of Melnyk's successor. Although she was already frustrated by "the costly errors Lewis repeatedly made," her own *Amazing Space*, a co-publication of Longspoon and NeWest, was the final straw: the book turned into a production nightmare because of Lewis's poor choice of typesetter. Although the press now freelances much of its editorial work, at that time, board members did the editing and proofreading and sometimes page layout and design of its books. They also continued to loan the press money on occasion. Neuman sums up that she "wasn't going to donate money and time to a press run by him [Lewis]." Barbour, on the other hand, had little difficulty with Lewis, although he admits that other members had difficulty with his inability to understand or carry out the orders of the board. Wiebe takes a diplomatic view: he describes Lewis as too laid back and not "up to taking the press beyond a continual beginning."

Since Lewis's dismissal in 1988, NeWest has had a series of increasingly professional managers who have approached publishing as a business. Liz Grieve, the press's current general manager, has decreased NeWest's dependency on grants from 70% to 50% over the eight years she has been with the press (Barbour, personal interview). However, the editors have also learned to monitor themselves. Barbour comments that they have become "less personally oriented in terms of their reading, sometimes rejecting books they love because of a too small market." He continues:

> We learned in the 80s to become hard-minded in a way we hadn't been earlier, that is to say, we have to think about whether or not this is a book that can even sell the number we print in the first printing. We can't publish a book that's going to just die . . . We can't afford to be that kind of generous small press that I think we were and a lot of presses were back when all the money was flowing freely to support the arts. In that sense, we're more pragmatic.

Bessai similarly remarks that the press has "got to be more commercial. We can't just fool around with anything we take a fancy to that may or may not sell" (personal interview). If one change most dramatically marks a shift toward a more business-like outlook, it is that

the office now costs the board's proposals and has been given the power to say no to a proposal if a book is not viable. While the board's executive is included in this process, the office, nonetheless, acts as a rational voice to counter the personal whims of board members.

In spite of an increasing attention to the bottom-line, the press was unable to avert serious financial difficulties in 1995. The press survived this period which instigated the closure of Coach House in part because the University of Alberta Press gave it a space rent-free for almost a year (although it again has its own home, it is no longer located on Whyte Avenue, the heart of Edmonton's trendy arts district, but nearby on the not quite so up-market 109th Street). As well, Wiebe attributes the press's survival to its "conservative" approach to expansion and finances: while the severe government cutbacks of 1995 hit the press badly, they were not as detrimental to NeWest as they were to many other presses "who had gone deeply into the new funding programs" (personal interview). Unlike Coach House which had been lured into the new business-based programs in the 1990s,[9] NeWest was never interested in pushing beyond a $200,000 sales level which the programs encouraged presses to do.

The press's current pragmatism is aimed at paying back investments and not making profits. NeWest, Barbour remarks, is trying a balancing act -- it is aiming to be a little more than a small press, that is, a mid-size press which "sustains itself over the long term with long-term cultural capital but is willing to take advantage of short-term popular books if they fit the press's mandate" (personal interview). On its literary side, the press, for instance, has moved into mystery publishing with titles such as Suzanne North's *Healthy, Wealthy and Dead.*[10] On its general side, it tried to capitalize on the short-term appeal of a hot political topic -- Ralph Klein -- with Mark Lisac's *Klein Revolution*, which did well for a almost a year. While it was a success as a "short-term" book, NeWest discovered it cannot really do these kinds of books well: the press lacks the capital to offer the large author advances needed to get these books written quickly.

Due to the strength of its backlist and more popular titles, NeWest can still risk publishing some books that may just die. Barbour offers Beth Goobie's *Scars of Light*, a book Rudy Wiebe brought to a board meeting at the last minute, as a case in point. Because three members need to support a proposal before it can be brought to a vote,[11]

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[9] See Chapter One, p. 100 for a discussion of Coach House's experience with these new business-based funding programs.

[10] While the book was not a huge success, perhaps the press did it too well: North's next book in the Phoebe Fairfax series, *Seeing is Deceiving*, was picked up by McClelland and Stewart. Barbour reflects that while North was grateful to NeWest for publishing her when others would not, the press ultimately cannot compete with M&S's author advances or sales distribution.

[11] Because NeWest's board is no longer as large as it was in the 1980s, the press no longer has a formal division between LAB and GAB.

two other editors, including Barbour, read it that night, returning to the meeting the next day to say that the book was so incredibly powerful that NeWest just had to do it. While Barbour notes that the board had dreams that it might sell to a wider audience interested in stories of sexual abuse and psychology, and not just poetry readers, thus far the book has not broken into this bigger market though it has paid back its costs. The book will be reprinted, because, as Barbour says, "it's a book that we should keep in print" (personal interview). This emphasis on cultural significance suggests that the board's initial dreams of larger sales seem to have been more a way to justify a book the editors really wanted to do and which otherwise lay outside the press's current philosophy. The editors' quick response to a good proposal on the basis of quality and not money shows, according to Barbour, "how a board like NeWest's can work." Thomas Wharton, one of the newest members of NeWest's board, offers the next Nunatak, a fiction series devoted to first-time authors, as another example of the press's commitment to quality and not sales. While it is a book of short stories, which received wisdom has it are guaranteed flops, the board agreed to publish it because it was a strong manuscript. The board, in fact, had initially rejected it, but by the end of the meeting decided that it deserved publication and to forgo its policy of not publishing risky titles.

NeWest's conception of regionalism has altered since Melnyk, a not surprising fact given the number of editors involved with the press since the early 1980s. As Barbour notes, while Melnyk's radical regionalism has been shared to some degree among the editors they have identified with it in different ways so that it has become much looser (personal interview). Since its expansion in the early 80s the press has once again become more provincially based, supporting Frank Davey's view of how "[i]n literature there has been some movement away from regionalist understandings like the 'west' or 'prairies' toward political ones based on provincial boundaries" ("Towards the Ends" 10). But this emphasis on Alberta has been the product less of any ideological shift, than, as Barbour suggests, the increasing number and cultural status of publishing houses in the West's other provinces. The press remains committed to "the West," continuing to publish writers from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia when it can. Rather than fall back within its provincial boundaries, the press has recently expanded into the Northwest Territories, an expansion which was the product of Rudy Wiebe's and Diane Bessai's interests in the North. While the press still publishes literary and non-literary titles which are on some level from and about the west, when asked what might unify its mandate and editorial selections beyond this more broadly stated one, Barbour responded cryptically that "books fit because we say so" (personal interview), a comment which the press's expansion into the Northwest Territories supports. Yet NeWest's lists are not as eclectic as Barbour's comment may imply. As Bessai's remark that "there is a general left of centre feel about the board. I mean we all assume everybody votes NDP" (personal interview) implies, its non-fiction side has maintained Melnyk's interest in left-wing social and political history with titles such as *What's Left? A New Social Contract* (1986) edited by John Richards and Don Kerr, *The Last Great Forest: Japanese Multinationals and Alberta's Northern Forest* (1994) by Larry Pratt and Ian Urquhart and *Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West* (1996) by Harry and

Mildred Gutkin. The press has also upheld an investment in documenting the social history of the west through earlier titles such as Frank Roe's *Getting the Know-How: Homesteading and Railroading in Early Alberta* (1982) and David Murray's *The Prairie Builder: Walter Murray of Saskatchewan* (1984) to later ones such as Beulah Baldwin's *Pioneer Family* (1992) and Robert Kroetsch's *Alberta* (1993).

It is at once harder and not that hard to find consistencies in NeWest's literary list. This list has reflected a mix of literary styles, genres, and poetics, with texts ranging from the more stylistically and ideologically conservative to the more formally innovative and anti-mainstream.[12] Nonetheless, through the Wiebes, Kroetschs, and van Herks, as well as the Bessais, Barbours, Kambourelis, and Neumans, NeWest's literary publishing has been closely tied to canonical revision in the university: how it has been shaped by the press's connection to the university and the implications of that shaping is the focus of the rest of this chapter.

The Literary Academic Coterie

By helping to ensure the long-term cultural capital and thus strong backlist position of some of its titles, the press's ties to the university have been crucial for its financial survival. Yet, as a trade publisher for a general audience, NeWest has attempted to bring even the titles with the most appeal for the university curriculum to a larger reading public. When the Alberta Foundation for the Literary Arts refused to subsidize Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Mischik*'s Gaining Ground: European Criticism on Canadian Literature* because it was "too scholarly," the press insisted: "NeWest is *not* an academic publisher; it is a trade publisher and all its books are aimed at an informed general reader with a serious interest in the area" (Letter to Chairman of Alberta Foundation for the Literary Arts). As this incident highlights, there are financial as well as cultural reasons for publishing to a "general" audience: beyond any sales that this audience might generate, government funding bodies such as Alberta Foundation for the Literary

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[12] The application of the labels "conservative" and "innovative" to texts, with perhaps the exception of some obvious examples, is a value-judgment which changes with time. Although these applications often say more about the critic than the texts themselves, I risk offering the following lists, which are not meant to be comprehensive but suggestive, to show how NeWest has consistently published a mixed range of literature. More conservative works: *Station 14* by Miriam Mandel (1977), The *Immortals* by Ed Kleiman (1980), *From a High Thin Wire* by Joan Clark (1982), *Vanished in Darkness: An Auschwitz Memoir* by Eva Brewster (1984) -- republished in 1986 as the press's second mass market paperback (*Alberta Bound* was its first) -- *How I Flew the Forties* by William O'Callaghan (1984), and *The Cock's Egg* by Rosemary Nixon (1994). More experimental works: *The Crow Journals* by Robert Kroetsch (1980), *Visible Visions* by Doug Barbour (1984), *Ghost Works* by Daphne Marlatt, *Chorus of Mushrooms* by Hiromi Goto (1994), and *Moon Honey* by Suzette Mayr (1995).

Arts as well as the Canada Council do not support academic books. As this incident equally suggests, the press has not always been entirely successful at convincing granting agencies of its trade aims. Nor has it always been successful at convincing audiences: hired by Jack Lewis in 1987 to suggest ways of improving NeWest, publishing consultant J. J. Douglas contextualized his marketing and distribution advice by remarking, "NeWest is seen as a closed shop run for the interests of literary academics."

Gaining Ground was part of the Western Canadian Literary Document Series, and in the press's series publishing we can most readily see NeWest's attempts to negotiate its investments in books which appeal to a university audience within its publicly stated role as a trade publisher. The purpose of establishing a series is to create a brand name, a capitalist device, which increases sales for individual titles by constructing an audience for the series as a whole. While publishers such as Harlequin use series publishing for mass market fiction, NeWest uses it to market lines which typically have been based in the university through authorship, readership, or both. Certainly, series at NeWest are not entirely about marketing. The press adopted series very early, for instance, Bessai's Prairie Play Series and Neuman's Western Canadian Literary Document Series, as way for individual board members to express their interests. Nonetheless, by the mid-1980s, the board became aware of the other advantages series offer to publishing: at its annual meeting in October 1985, the board decided that it should give visible identity to its various series through design. The two series on which I focus the following discussion, The Writer as Critic Series and Nunatak Fiction series, underline the impact that the two major trends in the canonical revision of the past three decades have had on the press's literary publishing. As John Guillory writes: "The movement to open the literary canon to works by minority authors has been parallelled in the last twenty-five years by an opening of the canon in another direction: the emergence of theory in the 1960s breached the disciplinary fortifications between literary texts and texts derived from other discourses, such as linguistic, the psychoanalytic, the philosophical" (176). NeWest's The Writer as Critic series represents the opening of the Canadian canon to the new theoretical discourses outlined by Guillory and its Nunatak Fiction series to minority voices.

Initiated in 1987, The Writer as Critic Series, edited by Smaro Kamboureli, publishes, as the name implies, the critical writings of creative writers. Arising out of the Board of Directors' enthusiastic response to her suggestion to publish a collection of essays by George Bowering, the series, as Kamboureli notes in her proposal to the Board, would offer "an alternative to the predominantly 'academic' criticism in Canada" because critics who are also creative writers "tend to be more accessible to the general reader" (Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, Oct. 24-25, 1987). The notion of accessibility, however, is compromised by the list of authors from whom Kamboureli proposed to solicit manuscripts: Stephen Scobie, Aritha Van Herk, bpNichol, Dorothy Livesay, Douglas Barbour, Fred Wah, and Daphne Marlatt. With the exception of perhaps Dorothy Livesay, these writer-critics have built their reputations precisely on the *inaccessibility* of their works to a general audience. Most of the books published within the series to date confirm that, far from being an "alternative" to academic criticism the series offers an "alternative" academic criticism: George Bowering's *Imaginary Hand* (1988) which is

informed by deconstruction and postmodernism, Stephen Scobie's *Signature Event Cantext* (1989) by Derridean theory, Aritha van Herk's *In Visible Ink: Crypto-Fictions* (1991) by feminist-post-structuralism, and Frank Davey's *Canadian Literary Power* (1994) by materialist theories of cultural production. What the series claims to sell to a general audience are the forms of literary criticism newly consecrated in university English departments, particularly at the upper levels, the graduate school. Overall, the series reflects a confusion (or perhaps clarity) of purpose: each cover includes a series of horizontal lines over a muted multicoloured background which while it could evoke simplicity and accessibility looks more like a textbook; as well, Kamboureli's Preface in the first volume of the series which begins invitingly enough -- "The Writer as Critic Series invites readers to read criticism as literature -- continues, "If the essay, as Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard have argued, is an intellectual poem, then surely a writer's artistic signature is inscribed in her/his critical work in ways that expand our understanding of the function of both literature and criticism" (Bowering vii).

As the back covers emphasize in their notable lack of reference to the West, the books aim to challenge national conceptions of Canadian literary criticism, specifically through theoretical and not regional influences. The series' strong investment in opening up the *Canadian* canon in the direction of theory is also underscored by the inclusion of bpNichol in the proposal and Frank Davey in the series, two writer-critics whose regional status is questionable. While both Nichol and Davey are westerners by birth, both their long residence in Ontario and deep imbrication in the Toronto literary scene challenges their western status, particularly in view of NeWest's own policy on board membership. Because, as the minutes of the first board meeting in 1982 state, a board member will be removed from the board if he or she "moves permanently away from one of the four western provinces," in her proposal, Kamboureli expresses her anxiety about Nichol's appropriateness for the series. She includes a footnote which seeks to justify his inclusion but actually draws attention to the fact that he is not indisputably a western author: "bpNichol is appropriate for the "Writers as Critics Series" because he was born in Winnipeg, lived in Victoria, and still has strong ties with the West." Recognizing that Nichol's Manitoban birth on its own was a weak connection for his inclusion in the series, she emphasized his continued "strong ties with the West," a remark which relies more on Nichol's literary and personal affiliations with a number of western authors than any sense of the West as location. It is not surprising that Kamboureli would want to include Nichol in the series. Her list of potential authors, after all, is a list of prestigious names, not names still struggling to be "made," and by the mid-80s Nichol's name functioned as a brand name designating a consecrated avant-garde writing and criticism. A book of critical writings by Nichol would have a ready market in upper-level university courses and in certain avant-garde writing circles and, above all, would help announce a clear direction for the series.

The Writer as Critic Series has had very limited success for a general audience. As Barbour notes, the series has only a select market, and its advertising has been aimed at the university community (personal interview). Keith Garebian's "Where Are These Voices Coming From?," a review of the first five books in the series (the four cited above,

as well as *Phyllis Webb's Nothing But Brush Strokes: Selected Prose*) in *Books in Canada* in 1998 reflects something of the "general" public's resistance to the series. Garebian writes that many of the books are

> contaminated by deconstructionist jargon and an irritating tone springing out of an ideology developed by academics for their own elite. . . . In any event, where do their voices come from? In most instances, they come from university English departments, where, from the evidence at hand, there is a new syndrome that replaces the old Canadian anxiety-neurosis. It goes by the name of canon-anxiety, and it is an antic disposition that seeks to decolonize Canadian Literature and criticism . . . (16)

The only writer-critic about whom Garebian has anything good to say (he is most virulent toward Davey, but critical of Scobie and Bowering and neutral toward van Herk) is Phyllis Webb who "looks into her heart to write": "It is her unpretentious book that is the most radiant one in the series, carrying us back into the soul of creativity rather than into a critic's fertile mind" (18). Intriguingly, Webb's book initiated a repackaging: the bland textbook-like covers have been replaced with a design which emphasizes the individual creativity -- a large photograph of the author is now the dominant feature.

The press's Nunatak Fiction series, edited until recently by Aritha van Herk and Rudy Wiebe has, not surprisingly given that it features fiction and not criticism, more successfully mediated between general and university audiences. Nunatak Fictions are, as the series' description inside each book states, "especially selected works of outstanding fiction by new western authors." The word "Nunatak" is also defined within each book:

> It is an Inuktitut word meaning "lonely peak," a rock or mountain rising above ice. During Quaternary glaciation in North America these peaks stood above the ice sheet and so became refuges for plant and animal life. Magnificent nunataks, their bases scoured by glaciers, can be been seen along the Highwood Pass in Alberta Rocky Mountains and on Ellesmere Island.

By constructing writing as a solitary activity which only the best and naturally gifted can survive, this description appeals to Bourdieu's notion of the "charismatic ideology of creation" which by suppressing the question of who creates the creator "makes the author the first and last source of the value of his work" (76). Yet, as H. Callaghan's review of the first book in the series, Joan Crate's *Breathing Water*, emphasizes, the reputations of van Herk and Wiebe have helped launch these typically risky investments, that is, first-time authors, into the literary marketplace. While Callaghan ends the review by stating that *Breathing Water* "attains a respectable height for a first novel," Callaghan's previous comments do not suggest even such qualified praise: "the protagonist's constant whining and moaning," s/he writes, "just get boring . . . leav[ing] the reader unmoved"; and the book's strengths "aren't enough to form a solid novel." Callaghan's opening remarks

which focus on the series and not Crate's book suggest how the excitement generated by the series intervened between the negative assessment of most aspects of the book and its overall reception: "*Breathing Water* is the first book in an intriguing new line of fiction published by NeWest Press under the "Nunatak" label. . . . [T]he purpose of the series is to give new western authors an elegant launch into the big, wide world. Edited by author-academics Rudy Wiebe and Aritha van Herk, the series seems a worthy, even exciting undertaking." The possibilities offered by the elegant series, an elegance rhetorically attached to its editors and their roles as both authors and academics, translate into possibilities not only for Crate's future as a writer but for her current book as well.

Now in its ninth year, the series is able to rely less on its editors' reputations and more on the successes of some of its past titles for its prestige, a fact which bodes well for the series's future now that van Herk and Wiebe have left the press. Barbour notes that both Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and Suzette Mayr's *Moon Honey* have done very well, but Thomas Wharton's *Icefields* has had the most success, selling almost 10,000 copies (personal interview). Sales have included the tourist markets in Banff and Jasper National parks where Wharton's book has been sold in tourist shops -- shops which normally do not carry novels. Although the NeWest board did briefly consider ending the Nunatak Fictions with van Herk's and Wiebe's departures from the press in 1997 and 1998 respectively, it has decided to continue the series under the editorship of Thomas Wharton who joined the press in 1998 (Wharton, personal interview). It will, however, farm out some of the editing, which is a significant change. Both Wiebe and van Herk had done the often heavy work of editing first novels while they were involved with the series.

Nunatak reflects the evolution of the canon debate in Canada, particularly the opening of the university curriculum to minority voices based in ethnic and racial difference.[13] NeWest has a history of publishing ethnic authors but in recent years has increased its representation of visible minorities, an increase which has been particularly striking in the Nunatak series but which has not been limited there, suggesting the changing dimensions of the press's concept of regionalism.[14] The press's ongoing

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[13] While gender has been the other category foregrounded in the canon debate, my focus on ethnicity and race is indicative of the more marked changes in NeWest's publishing record. The press has always published a large number of women, attributable to the number of women on its board.

[14] If we look solely at percentages, I would emphasize that the Nunataks are a somewhat misleading example of the press's increasing investments in visible minority authors -- four of the ten titles published in the series so far are by writers of colour, suggesting that this group has come to represent 40% of NeWest's books since 1989 when the series began. While the press has published books by writers of colour outside of the Nunataks both within its literary list, for example, Roy Kiyooka's *Mothertalk* (1997) and Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* (1996), and also within its trade side, Minh Thanh Nguyen's *Leaving Vietnam* (1996) and George Blondin's *Yamoria the Lawmaker* (1997), the reality of its representation of visible minorities for its complete list is closer to 20% of

reflection of ethnic diversity is related to the cultural make-up of the West where, as Leo Driedger points out, "no group dominates the region culturally, nor has the right to such a claim historically, demographically, economically, or politically" (96). Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's announcement in 1971 that Canada was officially bilingual helped transform the West's distinctive ethnic dimension into a politics, a reaction not appeased by the federal government's heralding of a federal multicultural policy at the same time. The competing and incompatible investments in this bilingual/multicultural formulation are evident in Trudeau's only public pronouncement on the issue:

> We believe that cultural pluralism is the very essence of Canadian identity. Every ethnic group has the right to preserve and develop its own culture and values within the Canadian context. To say we have two official language is not to say we have two official cultures, and no particular culture is more 'official' than another. A policy of multiculturalism must be a policy for all Canadians. (qtd. in Harney 72)

Bilingualism had legal status while multiculturalism was only a policy -- it would not become law until 1988 with the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, Bill C-93 -- suggesting for whom Canada's new official Canadian identity was really created: Quebec. This suspicion was confirmed by the fact that the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism included a study of the impact of ethnic groups on the fabric of Canadian society into its mandate only at the last minute. Multicultural policy was seen as a last ditch effort to diffuse public resistance to bilingualism.

As a policy of unification, multiculturalism has worked to consolidate Canada into one big multi-ethnic community, ironically by universalizing a discourse of cultural pluralism. By imposing similarities on ethnic experience across the nation-state, it provides Canadians with a powerful metanarrative which contains not only racial and ethnic difference but also regional difference. In response, ethnicity has become for some regional movements a focal point for marking their distinction from the centre and each other. George Melnyk emphasized ethnicity's role in creating a viable western regionalism in numerous essays both in *Radical Regionalism* and *Beyond Alienation*. In "Toward an Indigenous Society," he writes:

> The regionalist's need to liberate indigenous elements and make them dominant unites with the ethnic's desire to redefine the West as a new homeland. Because ethnicity is such an important part of the West's identity, any developments within it necessarily influence the direction of the regional struggle . . . Even though the West does not presently have an indigenously-oriented society, one can speculate on how regionalism and ethnicity would interact and push the West in a new direction. (*Radical Regionalism* 84)

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authors published since 1989.

The earliest non-WASP writers published by NeWest tended to be of Ukrainian, Swedish, Italian, German, and Jewish descent. The first shift to writers of colour occurred in the late 80s with several books by native writers: Joan Crate's *Breathing Water* (1989), Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia's Vance's *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada* (1990), Dianne Meili's *Those Who Know: Profiles of Alberta's Native Elders* (1991), and Linda Shorten's *Without Reserve: Stories from Urban Natives* (1991). Since then NeWest writers have been of Japanese, Indian, and Vietnamese descent.

Regional responses to ethnicity have been more complicated than suggested by its use as an anti-centrist resistance strategy. Frank Davey remarks that "[d]ifferences internal to a regionalism . . . are usually effaced and recuperated by [the region]" (3), and regional writers of colour have also resisted the homogenizing conceptions of their specific locales. A book such as Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the sixth book published in the Nunatak Fiction series, performs this double-work of ethnicity. While the press's back cover description of the novel refers to Goto as a "Japanese Canadian feminist writer," Fred Wah's back cover comment qualifies the Canadianness of her experience by locating the book in Alberta: "This novel is palpably audible -- full of the taste of words that whip through the Alberta foothills and sting the migrant wind." Goto's novel is an eloquent interpretation of living and growing up Japanese in a racist, rural Alberta, succinctly summed in its protagonist's remark, "Hard to grow up in agricultural hell, in cowboy purgatory" (124). The second last scene insists on the inclusion of the protagonist's experience of Alberta by placing her not against the backdrop of the Calgary stampede but as a participant within it. Now a rodeo rider who carries her equipment in a *furoshiki*, she faces a bull with "such nasty eyes on his lamb-white face" (217). As she rides the bull, she muses, "Only the bull and me, never partners, but never really enemies" (218). Thus the novel is a resistance narrative against both the national and regional constructions of common experiences of "Canadians" and "westerners".

While NeWest's increased representation of writers of colour is an effect of both canonical revision within the university and changes in the larger field of power through multicultural policy, a mutual imbrication which suggests how some books can achieve larger audiences and be picked up by the university, overall, the board members with whom I spoke attribute this change at the press to their role as university professors. Certainly, the books published within Nunatak Fiction reflect the values which have come to define the preferences of university English departments -- multiplicity, instability, fragmentation, disjuncture. *Chorus of Mushrooms* refuses closed readings, insisting throughout that there is no such thing as a "true story"; Suzette Mayr's *Moon Honey* emphasizes the multiple interpretations possible of any experience through her ironic ending, "The world is a tidy place" (212); and Yasmin Ladha's *Lion's Granddaughter and Other Stories*, another Nunatak, plays with the boundaries between reader and writer, inviting the reader closer only to resist too close an identification. "I swear," the narrator tells her *Readerji*, "there is enough friction-(sweet) fiction between us" (99).

Wiebe describes Nunatak as "one of the best things [NeWest] ever did" (personal interview). By giving new writers who would not be published by big publishers the opportunity to appear in print, the series embodies one of the crucial roles of the small

press. In this, it has certainly been very successful. But it is worth asking, as Keith Garebian does for The Writer as Critic Series, where are these voices coming from? While the press receives many unsolicited manuscripts for the Nunataks, all but one of the authors in the series have taken creative writing courses with van Herk and Wiebe at the Universities of Calgary or Alberta. The exception is Meira Cook, author of *The Blood Girls* (1998), who is a graduate student at the University of Winnipeg. The importance of this group as a resource for Nunatak Fiction is underscored by the fact that Wiebe left the press in part because he had retired from the university and felt out of touch with students (personal interview).

NeWest's publication of writers of colour has been a financial boon to the press. Barbour notes that Asian writing is particularly "hot" at the moment, and NeWest authors Goto and Fred Wah have found foreign rights and bookstore and university sales (personal interview). Beyond sales, the press's publication of writers of colour has also helped the press's reputation with the Canada Council. Throughout the 1990s, it has typically received one of the highest bonus point awards within the Council's Block Grant program. Having begun the 1990s with bonus points of 6.0 (out of a possible 10), in 1991 its points had increased to 7.5 when the average stood at 4.8 and in 1992 to 7.9 when the average was 3.9.[15] In a letter informing the press of its 1992 Block Grant, Gordon Platt, the Council's Publishing Officer, wrote to the press's general manager, Liz Grieve, "The jury was impressed with your 1991 list and awarded a 5% increase in your total grant at a time when our budget is under a great deal of pressure. In particular, they complimented you for your strong cover designs, good editorial decisions, and your commitment to literature, new writers, and Native authors" (April 15, 1992, 2).[16] As Platt's summary of the jury's comments suggests, a number of factors contributed to NeWest's high bonus points; yet, the jury's emphasis on the press's commitment to "Native authors" was significant given the changes at the Council during this period. By the end of the 1980s, the Council faced serious pressure to rethink its commitment to "cultural excellence" which, as it was increasingly being informed, typically excluded writers of colour from

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[15] NeWest's block grant in 1991 was $64, 080 (base $20,330, bonus $39,750, reprint $4,000) and in 1992 it was $69,461 (base $22,591, bonus $41,870, and reprint $5,000).

[16] Later in his letter, Platt oulines more fully the pressures faced by the Block Grant program: "The budget has been flat for the past five years while the growth in the number of eligible publishers as well as monetary inflation have been considerable. This has caused the average amount awarded per title and per publisher to decline. For the base component of the program we were able to contribute only 38% of average industry genre deficits, the same as 1991 but down from 41% in 1990 and over 50% just five years ago" (2). This letter has not yet been transferred to the press's archives at the University of Manitoba but remains in-house. While in-house records were closed to me, the press did allow me access to some of its grants' files. My thanks to Liz Grieve for making this possible and for giving me a tour of the press.

equal access to Council grants. Tom Henighan outlines in *Presumption of Culture* how the Council embraced a policy of cultural diversity in 1989, which it then pursued systematically for the next several years: in 1990, it created an Advisory Committee for Racial Equality in the Arts and the First People's Advisory Committee on the Arts; as well, it hired an equity coordinator, scanned its documents for ethocentric bias, and provided its juries with representatives from minority groups (63-64). Within this climate, NeWest's own commitment to cultural diversity played a role in its bonus award.

Not everyone has reacted so positively to NeWest's representation of "other" voices. The Regina Aboriginal Writers' Group, Marie Baker reported in *Briarpatch* in 1990, boycotted Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia Vance's *Writing the Circle* anthology over the appropriation of voice issue. Baker wrote that white editors Perreault and Vance "approached the group to look at drafts but insisted on maintaining final responsibility." In a panel on cultural activism and publishing at the de:Scribing Albertas conference (1996), Ashok Mathur, a member of the writers of colour collective of the Calgary-based *absinthe* magazine, asked Doug Barbour and Rudy Wiebe, who also sat on the panel, "Is [NeWest] still a white-middle class press?" ("Panel Discussion" 134).[17] Mathur's discussion of how *absinthe* has approached various writing communities in Calgary which lie outside of the university community to which the collective is tied underscores how his question is not about how many writers of colour NeWest publishes but who makes up the press's board. With a few exceptions, NeWest's board is predominantly white, supporting John Guillory's conclusion about educational democratization -- "that it is much easier to make the canon representative than the university" (7).

A discourse of publishing the "best" has circulated at NeWest. Teresa Smalec reports in "The Political Pedagogies at the University of Calgary"[18] that when she asked Aritha van Herk if NeWest and Red Deer College Press were primarily academic presses, van Herk responded, "None of the presses you mention publish books only by academics" and added, "We seek to publish the best manuscripts possible" (86). Similarly, during our interview, Barbour echoed van Herk's sentiments about NeWest's process of selecting books. His answer came in response to my question about whether NeWest had made a deliberate effort to expand in the area of writers of colour. He remarked that press "just publishes the best" and referred to its "colour blindness" and "loving the books on their own." An emphasis on "the best" at the press derives from its belle lettristic roots and its interest in "literate" and "well-informed" readers. It is strikingly similar to the Canada Council's support of "cultural excellence," which while having enabled many communities has left many others out.

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[17] Mathur's question was also directed to another panel member, Dennis Johnson of Red Deer College Press.

[18] In her thought-provoking essay, Smalec examines what Alberta writing gets taught at the University of Calgary and how it is taught. She bases her study on an email survey of a number of professors in the university's Department of English.

Conclusion

The recent retirements of Wiebe and van Herk have heightened NeWest's awareness that it must find new board members. During the 1980s, the press's occasional attempts to expand its board related to broadening its scope;[19] now, bringing new blood to the press is about ensuring its survival. Both Bessai and Barbour are very enthusiastic about Tom Wharton's recent appointment to the board. His inclusion represents both continuity and the potential for change at NeWest. While Wharton's editorial policy for the Nunataks is "to look at anything and pick up the best" (personal interview), his attitude to regionalism is strikingly different from the old guard. For the long-standing members of the press, the oppositional politics of regionalism remain a crucial element of the press's mandate: while admitting that regionalism might not be the crusade it once was, Bessai believes that we may be coming full circle in terms of the reviewing and publishing practices of the Toronto industry; Wiebe reflected with annoyance on the University of Toronto's recent "Top 100 English-Canadian Books" list which includes only "five or six" books by westerners and none of Robert Kroetsch's work;[20] Barbour observed that Wharton's book has become a "Canadian bestseller without Toronto noticing" and that its failure to be shortlisted for the Smith's First Book award was a travesty. "There's a part of me," Barbour added, "that's just a westerner saying those fucking easterners." Wharton, on whose behalf Barbour was so indignant, reflects that while it is extremely important to have presses outside of Toronto, regionalism no longer needs to be a crusade. He rather sheepishly added that he would be happy to see the press's mandate "get stretched" to include writers from anywhere in Canada, even Toronto: "The first and foremost consideration is the quality of the writer."

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[19] While the 1982 expansion of the board was its most comprehensive attempt to bring new interests the press, in 1985 it again sought to "broaden [its] scope" by inviting new shareholders onto the board: Doug Ouram, Terry Heath, Chuck Steele, Dick Harrison, Candas Dorsey, Leila Sujir, and Bill Waiser (Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, Oct. 19, 1985).

[20] See www.saila.com/people/canbooks.shtml.

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3

GYNERGY BOOKS: A LESBIAN FEMINIST PRESS ON P.E.I.

In 1983 . . . we published our first children's books, all of which are still in print and one of which [*A Child's Anne* by Deirdre Kessler] is now in its 4th printing (its not one of my favourites . . . but what do you do with a book that keeps selling and selling?)

--Libby Oughton, Publishing Seminar, March 27, 1987

The permeation of the island by Montogomeriana is, understandably, irksome to some contemporary writers, particularly on an island that produced a poet as magnificent as Milton Acorn. Louise Fleming, of the small but muscular Ragweed Press, is critical yet realistic. Her publishing house produces guidebooks to Anne-spotting, the success of which enables it to publish lesbian short stories and radical feminist poetry. "This is an island that lives by Anne of Green Gables and will die by Anne of Green Gables," says Fleming. "I mean, try being a feminist here. There's no sex education on P.E.I, a high rate of unemployment and teenage pregnancy. For God's sake, there's no abortion clinic."

--Michael Coren, "Anne Goes Prime Time (Anne of Green Gables)," 1993

As the epigraphs to this chapter suggest, gynergy's founder Libby Oughton and current owner Louise Fleming have held ambivalent attitudes to what Michael Coren calls the "Montgomeriana" sweeping Prince Edward Island. As publishers who have operated from a place with small local markets for books and minuscule and sporadic provincial grants for publishing and who have actually earned their livings from the press -- without the free labour of a large editorial board -- both Oughton and Fleming have capitalized on the popularity of L.M. Montgomergy and her girl-hero Anne of Green Gables by producing under gynergy's sister press, the regionally-focussed Ragweed, Anne books as well as cookbooks and guidebooks for the hundreds of thousands of tourists who flood the Island each year. Yet, as producers whose primary aim has been cultural activism and not financial success, an identification with the commercialism of the tourist trade induces anxiety. "Cookbooks" circulates in the field of restricted production as the catch-all term for books which are too immediately profitable to sustain the logic of a field "that makes of asceticism in this world the condition of health in the hereafter" (Bourdieu, *Rules* 148) and marks the line between the serious and unserious, pure and impure cultural producer. "I don't know what market David Young's been thinking of, although I know it isn't cookbooks, although it cd be cooked up books" (n. pag.), Frank Davey wrote with simultaneous relief and consternation to George Bowering in 1986 when Young and Valerie Frith, as the new managers of Coach House, warned the editors that they would have to mute their disavowal of the economy. Similarly, Rudy Wiebe worried at the de:Scribing Albertas conference in 1996 that cuts in grants would mean that NeWest is "going to be left publishing cookbooks" (qtd. in "Panel Discussion" 140). But he quickly added, "[W]e don't like cookbooks, don't know how to publish them, don't know how to market them . . . so it's never going to sustain us." As the case of Ragweed/gynergy reminds us, not all presses can afford the luxury of refusing to learn how to publish "cookbooks."

Libby Oughton established gynergy as an imprint of Ragweed in 1987 as a way to

negotiate the material necessities of her location and the logic of restricted production. Certainly, the degree of economic capital generated by Ragweed's commercial books was not as large as the size of PEI's tourist trade might suggest. In 1984, Oughton informed *The Magazine That's All About Small Business* that together her three best-sellers, *A Child's Anne*, *Seafood Cookery*, and another children's book *Witch of Port LaJoye*, had sold only 10,000 copies (Moulton-Barrett 12). Taking into account the low retail price of the books, the 40% cut to booksellers, the 10% royalties to authors, as well as the costs of production and distribution, she emphasized, "Selling regional trade titles is a very marginal business." Nonetheless, when Oughton created her feminist imprint she saw a clear division between the books which would bring the press money -- and which she would continue to publish under Ragweed -- and the books she loved -- which she would produce under gynergy. Her approach to the economic management of her press was at least partially a product of the kind of imprint she envisioned gynergy to be. Unlike the first wave of Canadian feminist book publishers, the Women's Press and Press Gang, which were founded in the early 1970s to produce both fiction and non-fiction for the women's movement, under Oughton, gynergy was a solely literary enterprize for formally innovative writing. "I like fiction and poetry because it can jump as far into the future and the imagination as you want," she told the feminist review *Broadside*, "Non-fiction just tells you the facts" ("Spirit of Ragweed"). As early as 1980, Margie Wolfe, then of the Women's Press, reported that the large amount of public and institutional funding for women's publishing which emerged in the early 1970s was gone. "'Women' are no longer a priority," she warned, and "[w]e'll have to become more business-minded if we are to survive" (14). gynergy, committed to unprofitable books and supported by Ragweed, was a space where Oughton did not have to be business-minded.

Since taking over Ragweed/gynergy in 1989, Louise Fleming has altered the directions of gynergy. Joined a year later by Sibyl Frei, the two co-owners have brought the press closer in line with other feminist presses in Canada and elsewhere. While they continue to publish some literary titles, they have increasingly focussed on books of non-fiction -- to which they feel the most personal commitment and which they hope will become resources for the lesbian and feminist movements both inside and outside of academic institutions. They have also adopted the more business-like approach which Wolfe foresaw in the early 1980s as necessary. Interviewing nine feminist presses in the United States in 1986, Andrea Fleck Clardy could be more specific about what this approach has meant: "Feminist publishers do not produce the pet rocks or cabbage patch dolls of the literary world. . . . They do not expect their titles to become fads. What they do expect increasingly is that every book they publish will hold its own if properly produced and promoted" (7). Reflecting this general philosophy, the fetish of asceticism is now absent at gynergy, but without removing the press from the field of restricted production.

At the same time as this chapter explores the changes at gynergy in terms of mandate and financial operation, it emphasizes the difficulties of being a feminist publisher outside of Canada's major centres. gynergy is the only one of English Canada's five feminist presses located outside of Toronto and Vancouver: the Women's Press, Second

Story, and Sister Vision maintain their offices in Toronto, and Press Gang, the only other Canadian feminist press to make lesbian writing an equal focus of its mandate, in Vancouver. Although gynergy maintains close connections with the network of feminist presses and bookstores across Canada and internationally, outside of the trade it remains Canada's least well-known feminist press. Because national ideology identifies metropolitan centres with national and global interests and the regions with provincialism, feminist presses which construct their communities along transprovincial and transnational lines are more readily visible when located in those centres. Both the slow growth of gynergy under Oughton and the sense of isolation experienced by the press's current owners underscore the difficulties of being a feminist press in a region, difficulties compounded, as Michael Coren's reference to the "muscular Ragweed Press" in the second epigraph to this chapter suggests, by gynergy's close association with a regionalist publishing house.

Libby Oughton: The Growth of a Lesbian Feminist Literary Imprint

With the publication of Nicole Brossard's long lyrical love poem to women *Sous la langue / Under Tongue* in May of 1987, gynergy books was officially born. Upon hearing Brossard read her poem at Les Tribades' celebration of lesbian writing in Montreal earlier that same year, Libby Oughton recalls, "I knew with instant clarity not only that this should be the first gynergy book, but precisely how it would look. In co-operation with Odette DesOrmeaux of L'Essentielle, Éditrices, we published *Sous la langue / Under Tongue* in a beautiful seagreen chapbook, with all the production of the book done by women" ("A Few Notes" 1). While Oughton recognized immediately what book would appropriately launch gynergy, her decision to establish her own lesbian feminist literary imprint developed gradually over the course of more than twenty years' involvement in Canadian publishing. Living in Toronto for the first 16 years of her publishing career, she worked in a variety of capacities, including as the managing editor for *This Magazine Is About Schools* from 1964-66, a researcher for McClelland & Stewart on The Natural History of Canada Series from 1966-68, and a masker, stripper, and printer for Coach House Press from 1970-73. In 1973, as a divorced mother of two teen-aged children for whom "recycled and sally ann clothes were no longer acceptable," Oughton migrated away from the industry's front-line to work for the Association of Canadian Publishers when it was still called the Independent Publishers Association, starting as an Information Officer and eventually becoming its Assistant Director, with a year off in between as the Rights Agent for Books Canada in London, England (Oughton, "Joys and Sorrows" 4). Before joining the IPA, her maximum salary had been $3,000; she called her position as Information Officer her "first job in the real world" (4).

In 1980, with her children grown and needing "a change badly," Oughton moved from Toronto to Prince Edward Island to team up with Harry Baglole at Ragweed Press, first co-owning the province's only publishing house but within a year taking on its sole ownership and management ("How Far" 2). Under Baglole, a history professor at the

University of Prince Edward Island, Ragweed had grown slowly. From the time he established the press in 1974 to Oughton's arrival, Baglole had produced only four books, all on Island history and all of which he had helped write: *The Island and Confederation: The End of an Era, Cornelius Howatt: Superstar!, Chappel Diary*, and *Exploring Island History*. By 1980, Baglole was determined to change Ragweed from "a vanity press for himself and his friends" into "a more ambitious and formal operation that would publish books on many aspects of Island life besides history" (Duerden 38). His opportunity arrived with Oughton who was willing to shoulder the costs of publishing a project he already had in mind, a book of paintings by Prince Edward Island folk artist Alfred Morrison. Together Baglole and Oughton incorporated Ragweed and put up $12,000 each to produce Morrison's *My Island Pictures* (Oughton, "Publishing Seminar" 1) .

With her first book with Ragweed, Oughton quickly discovered the practical difficulties of publishing on the Island, especially an expensive, full-colour, hardcover book like *My Island Pictures*. She learned that no one on PEI had the capability to do colour separations, that none of the Island's typesetters carried the font they wanted, and that the province's only two printers felt that the book was too complex for them to handle. All work had to be done off the Island. Oughton recounted in a speech for the Atlantic Canada Institute in 1982: "So Harry and I gathered together all the pieces from here and there, held our breath and sent the book off to Upper Canada [for printing]" ("Joys and Sorrows" 7). Too poor to make the trip to look at the press proofs, Oughton and Baglole had to trust the printer to get the colour right. Oughton describes looking at the finished product for the first time: "I can still remember the feeling of opening the book, and finding that the colour was quite different from Mr. Morrison's brilliant paintings. . . we blew it, a failure" (7). The book was also a financial failure, in spite of receiving good reviews, even a half-page review in the *Globe & Mail* by William French who called it "eccentric" and "charming." While *My Island Pictures* was very expensive to produce, its price had to be kept below the publishers' normal mark-up of four to five times the unit cost in order to be affordable to its main market, the financially poor Prince Edward Island. On top of this, Oughton and Baglole printed far too many copies: 5,000, of which only 2,500 sold by the middle of 1982. Although they made fewer mistakes with their next two books, *The Poets of Prince Edward Island* and *Watershed Red*, they still ran into production difficulties, particularly with the poetry anthology which they produced totally on the Island. "You may think," Oughton reminisced,

> that typesetting a book of poetry would be fairly straightforward, but it isnt when your printer's main business is newspapers, and local histories, but poetry? -- lines all on different places on the page, indentations, funny punctuation or funny spelling some time, which the typesetter insisted on correcting for me. Or she would line up the poems for me. (9)

Ragweed's publishers persisted and completed what Alden Nowlan called one of the finest anthologies produced that year.

After publishing three books with Oughton, Baglole decided to leave Ragweed

because "he was tired of the loans and no money" (Oughton, "How To" n. pag). Baglole and Oughton had financed all three of their projects almost entirely on their own. They received no federal money of any kind and only about 1/30th of the cost of the Morrison book and a few hundred dollars toward the poetry anthology from the PEI Council of the Arts. They were somewhat luckier with *Watershed Red* for which the University of PEI paid half the costs ("Joys and Sorrows" 11). Ragweed at this point was "a very tenuous floating office," maintained partly at the university, Oughton's home, Alfred Morrison's basement, and various restaurants (7). Both Baglole and Oughton had other full-time employment: Oughton at a bookstore as an assistant manager and Baglole at the university. In 1981, Oughton sold her home in Toronto and used the money to buy out Baglole's portion of the press and purchase an old apartment building in downtown Charlottetown which would house both her and her press. Let go from the bookstore, she became a full-time publisher. Reflecting on the unequal gender relations of her first years in publishing, Oughton would comment two years later, "I had worked in and around publishing for many years, almost always for men. There are many, many women in support roles in publishing" ("How Far" 2). There were financial inequities attached to being cast in these roles by her gender: only two months after the so-called "radical" IPA hired her as an Information Officer at a salary of $5,000, it hired a male director with less experience and education at $17,000 (Oughton, "Joys and Sorrows" 4). Although it was far from a financial coup, the purchase of Ragweed offered her the opportunity to run her own show.

Within two years of becoming the sole owner and publisher of Ragweed, Oughton began what would become a four-year effort to turn her regional press into a women's press -- an effort which would culminate in the creation of a separate imprint for lesbian and feminist literature, gynergy. Initially, however, although she changed a number of things about the press, including increasing the number of titles published annually, she retained its regional, though very quickly not specifically Island, character. In 1982, all nine Ragweed titles were by Prince Edward Island authors. But as Oughton asked in a speech she gave that year, "How can I publish books for a market that is just a little less than 1/3 of Halifax, and expect to survive?" ("Joys and Sorrows" 18). The answer is reflected in Ragweed's 1983 list: only one title, *Pearls*, a book of poetry by Fred Cogswell, is by an Islander (though one long transplanted to Fredericton) with the other eight titles by authors from the other three Atlantic provinces. In the years to follow, Island writers would typically constitute a greater portion of Ragweed's list than the 1983 figures indicate; nonetheless, Oughton expanded her mandate from Prince Edward Island to the wider Atlantic region. A poet herself, she increased the number of literary, especially poetry, books published under the Ragweed name, but moved as well into children's books and cookbooks. The latter, as Oughton would stress in interviews and speeches, was borne of financial necessity, the former of love. Interviewed, for instance, in 1984 for *The Magazine That's All About Small Business*, she remarked, "There are 2 kinds of books, survival books, like cookbooks, travel books, tourist books and kid's books; and books you're committed to, the special-interest and literary books. I'm trying the delicate balance between surviving as a small business and producing cultural books"

(qtd. in Mouton-Barrett 12).

Ragweed's 1984 list reflects Oughton's declining interest in regional publishing over the course of the previous year. Although the majority of the titles Oughton published were by Maritimers, she began to produce books by women authors "from away": Toronto writers CM Donald and Penny Kemp and British Columbia writer Patricia Young. This change was inspired by an invitation to give a speech at The Women & Words conference in Vancouver in 1983 which, as she noted in that speech, "forced [her] to do some serious reading and thinking about women in writing and publishing" ("How Far" 1). She read, for instance, Tillie Olsen's *Silences*, a powerful examination of how the material conditions of American women's lives and of American publishing and reception structures result in the silencing of women writers. Olsen's study of American literature in the 1970s concludes that for every four to five books published by men only one was published by a woman and that in terms of critical reception (which the author defines as "appearance in twentieth-century literature courses, required reading lists, textbooks, quality anthologies, the year's best, the decade's best, the fifty years' best, consideration by critics or in current reviews"), the ratio was far worse: 12 men to one woman (24). Sharon H. Nelson's 1982 article "Bemused, Branded, and Belittled: Women and Writing in Canada,"[1] also read by Oughton in preparation for the Women & Words conference, confirmed that the situation was no better in Canada. Exploring the institutional structures which hinder women writers from making it into print or from being taken seriously, Nelson noted that the League of Canadian Poets maintained in 1980 a 33% female membership even while 66% of the writers who had applied to the organization were women; that for the period 1972 to 1981 71.4% of recipients for all categories of the Canada Council's Writing and Publication Grants were men and 28.6% women; that Canadian literary anthologies from 1973 to 1982 contained only 26% women. Following Olsen and Nelson, Oughton remarked in her speech: "The male dominated power structure, in publishing as in society, operates a subtle or not so subtle censorship on what gets into print, and what stays in print. After all, that power structure pre-defines what is acceptable and even what is an acceptable form for the writing. This is an insidious system that keeps women out-of-print" (1).

In her first three years of publishing on her own, Oughton's ratio of male to female authors was notably better than the one Olsen outlines or the one suggested by the Canada Council statistics: approximately one to one (50% men and 50% women). Nonetheless, Oughton came to question to the censorship implicit in her own regional publishing programme. In a second speech she gave at the Woman & Words conference, she reflected on the books she had published to date: "I can look back now at those books and wonder why they weren't more unusual, why there weren't more by women. But I had joined a regional publishing house and tried to do responsible publishing for it" ("How To" n. pag.). Her interest in regional publishing derived not only from a sense of

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[1] Nelson's article is based on research done by Sharon Batt, Julie Bruck, Lee Courtois, and Sandra Lambert which was supported in part by the Status of Women Canada (66).

responsibility for Ragweed's regionalist mandate but from her own love of Prince Edward Island and the Maritimes. Though not an Islander by birth, she spent many of her childhood summers there and purchased a house in Cape Traverse in 1969 where she brought her own children almost every summer. Describing her work on a Social Studies textbook written for Island children by Islanders, a project initiated in 1981 but not completed until 1984, she commented: "All my underdog feelings, all my pride in this Island were at stake. Profit went down the tube. I wanted to produce a textbook for and about us, that every other province in Canada could be shown, to prove that YES it can be done locally, and done well" ("Joys and Sorrows" 14). As Oughton's use of the word "underdog" suggests, the oppositional nature of regional politics appealed to the woman who had marched against Vietnam and for women's right to abortion and had been involved in the underground politics of Coach House and Rochdale College and even the anti-British and anti-American politics of the Association of Canadian Publishers ("Joys and Sorrows" 2-4). Baglole had established Ragweed firmly in the anti-centrist tradition of regionalism. In 1973, he and David Weale wrote a historical perspective on the spirit of Prince Edward Island which they argued was being eroded by the federally-imposed Comprehensive Development Plan. Their book *The Island in Confederation at the End of an Era* was endorsed by the Halifax branch of McClelland and Stewart but vetoed by the national office on the grounds that it would not find sufficient sales. They ended up publishing the book themselves. For Baglole, Ragweed equally stood against the conservative politics of PEI. He took the name of his press from the provincial government's efforts to promote tourism on the Island by claiming it was ragweed-free. As Baglole stated, "I and many others knew that it wasn't" (qtd. in Duerden 38). If the PEI government was intent on stamping out ragweed to foster the tourist trade, Baglole was equally intent on encouraging ragweed by producing as many Ragweed books as he could.

Oughton announced at the Women & Words conference that "[s]tarting next year, Ragweed will only publish books by women, concentrating on fiction and poetry" ("How Far" 3). As this comment reveals, Oughton originally planned to express her growing commitment to women's writing by working from within Ragweed, that is, by transforming her regionalist publishing programme into a feminist one. The books Oughton published from 1984 to the founding of gynergy in 1987 suggest how the reality of changing Ragweed into a literary press that published women only proved much harder to accomplish than the intention: although the representation of women on Ragweed's list did increase somewhat, from 50% to 60%, Oughton continued to publish both books by men and non-fiction books, including Findley Martin's *A View from the Bridge: Montague, P.E.I.* (1984), Gregorary Cook's *Love in Flight* (1985), John Smith's *Midnight Found You Dancing* (1986), and *The Fishery of Prince Edward Island* (1986) by Kennedy Wells. There are numerous reasons why Oughton had difficulty in changing Ragweed as she had hoped, including financial ones. Remarking on the Jessie Coade's *Messdeck News*, published in 1985, Oughton underscored how profits continued to inform her decisions: "We also took on a title that we didn't really like, called *Messdeck News*, but looked like it was guaranteed to be a winner . . . about the Navy and it was their 75th

anniversary and they were all meeting in Halifax" ("Publishing Seminar" 4). The book was a flop, but nonetheless was chosen for what was thought to be its potential as a moneymaker.

Oughton did not limit her choice of male-authored texts to those which she believed had larger or surer markets. Both Cook's and Smith's books are books of poetry, that genre which Bourdieu calls the disinterested activity *par excellence* in the literary field because of its small market (51). A comment Oughton made to Daphne Marlatt in 1986 about her wish to publish Marlatt and Betsy Warland's *Double Negative* offers another reason why she could not transform Ragweed quickly[2]:

> And yes, Ragweed would like to publish it, as long as you can live with the timing. I have 16 titles on my list next year . . . far too many for 2 people. Will be glad to get it over with as it has the last of m/s I accepted long ago, some that I no longer care that much about (esp. a couple by guys). So in 1988 I can really have a purer list of the kinds of books that really suit me . . . women's fiction and poetry. So there is a very slim chance that I could get it out next fall, but realistically it will be early in the spring '88 season. Does that sound okay with you?" (1)

Old commitments continued to effect Oughton's list after her decision to change it.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of transforming the press was its reputation as a regional enterprise. Although the press was virtually unknown when Oughton purchased it, books such as Susan Kerslake's *The Book of Fears* (1984) which was nominated for the Governor General's award for fiction helped increase the visibility of the press outside of its region. Although Ragweed was publishing non-Maritime writers by this time, Kerslake was a Nova Scotia writer so that the first book to receive notable critical attention outside the region was associated with regionalism. In an effort to change at least some of her book buyers' perceptions of Ragweed, Oughton put out a brochure in 1986 entitled "Ragweed Press Publishes Books By Women, For Women, About Women."[3] The brochure lists Ragweed's female-authored childrens' books and books of fiction and poetry published in 1984 and 1985 and forthcoming in the 1986 season. The description of the press in that brochure reads: "Ragweed Press is owned and operated by women. Our office is in a former Catholic girls' school in the centre of Charlottetown (a town of 18,000 people), the capital city of the smallest province of Canada. Our major interests are fiction and poetry by women, and books for children and young people" (n. pag). While the brochure foregrounds the location of Ragweed in Canada's smallest capital city, it does so less to place the press in a regional context and more to highlight

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[2] *Double Negative* would be published in 1988 under the gynergy imprint.

[3] Unfortunately no mailing list for this brochure exists in the archives; however, brochures are typically used for special mailings geared toward specific audiences, in this case most likely for women's bookstores.

the difficulties posed by the anomalous position of a press whose major interest is in writing by women.

In her publisher's statement for Ragweed's catalogue in the same year, Oughton makes no claims to being primarily interested in fiction and poetry by women. She discusses instead how the press had just published its 50th book and how she regretted reporting that Ragweed's poetry books did not need reprinting. The one expression of her interest in women's issues is firmly located within local politics:

> We were not at all sorry to see our provincial Tories depart. We like to think that our strong fight against a Litton Systems plant setting up here, along with then Premier Lee's devastating remark at an all-candidates meeting dealing with women's issues, helped influence the outcome of the election. (Lee said that equal pay for equal work was a fashionable issue and the Tories were not into fashion.) (1)

The differences in tone and content between the brochure and the Ragweed catalogue reflect Oughton's keen sense of audience and her careful negotiations in the 1984-87 period between building a new audience for a women's press which would be pleased to hear about its increasingly specialized focus and maintaining her old audience which might be alienated by her interest in women's writing. While in a feminist publication such as *Broadside*, Oughton declared her goal "to have an all woman's list of fiction, poetry, journals, and diaries" ("The Spirit of Ragweed"), in general magazines such as *The Magazine That's All About Small Business* she talked about her commitment to producing cultural books without any specific reference to women's writing (Moulton-Barrett).

Early in 1987, after more than four years of trying to turn her regional press into a women's fiction and poetry press, Oughton decided to establish a new division of Ragweed for the work that interested her most. Having just returned from Les Tribades' celebration, Oughton related the origins of her plan to Daphne Marlatt in a letter dated March 6, 1987:

> Aube-Epine[4] and I have a plan afoot to take the erotic poem of Nicole's and the translation of it and put it into a beautifully produced chapbook . . . which Nicole thinks is a great idea. And then we were all sitting around thinking about what lesbian books do indeed get published in Canada, and figuring out that my fledgling list of 4 titles was just about as long as anyone's . . . which lead (sic) me to think, seeing this IS my interest, why not specialize . . . make a division of Ragweed that I would look after specially for this . . . and let someone else run the other trade-type books. . . . I am even tossing around a name, from Gyn/Ecology of Gynergy Books, a word with a fine meaning, but it makes funny sounds when it is said!

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[4] Aube-Epine became L'Essentielle, Éditrices by the time Brossard's *Sous la langue / Under Tongue* came out in May, 1987.

To help her customers with the meaning and pronunciation of "gynergy," Oughton was more precise about both in Ragweed Press's 1989/90 catalogue: the word means "women's energy" and is pronounced with "soft g's as in *joyeuse"* ("a few notes" 1). The fledgling list to which Oughton referred in her letter to Marlatt included Brossard's chapbook, which was to, and did, appear first, along with Marlatt and Warland's *Double Negative*, Margaret Yeo's *Unnatural Acts*, and C M Donald's *The Breaking Up Poems*. These works are books of poetry by lesbian feminist writers, suggesting a shift in Oughton's conception of the kinds of women's writing she wanted to publish. Although in her previous references to transforming Ragweed she emphasized her interest in "women's fiction and poetry," Oughton articulated gynergy's mandate in a more politicized manner: as she wrote to the *Feminist Book News*, gynergy would "publish only feminist and esp. lesbian poetry and fiction" (Letter to Carol 1).[5] Although Oughton had published lesbian writers previously under Ragweed, for example, C M Donald of *The Fat Lady Measures Up* (1986) and Gillian Hanscombe and Suniti Namjoshi of *Flesh and Paper* (1986), her emphasis on lesbian writing for gynergy reflects her own coming out as a lesbian and the contacts she had made within the lesbian community through her participation at Les Tribades' celebration. Her shift from the broader category of women's writing to the more specific one of feminist writing as well as her desire to "specialize . . . make a division of Ragweed" are reflected in the radical feminist position of Mary Daly's *Gyn/ecology*, which Oughton read in the fall of 1986 and from which she drew the name of her new imprint ("A Few Notes" 1). *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* advocates not only identifying the phallocratic strategies for women's oppression but moving from phallocratic babble to gynocentric writing (xx). Daly emphasizes that gynocentrism is not an invitation to men but to women who want to discover themselves: it implies separation (xlvi). The idea of a separate space in which women can empower themselves appealed to Oughton who wrote to Marlatt, "The dream grows to have, live in, an all women's community where I don't have to put up with the turkeys at any level of my life" (Nov. 15, 1986 1). gynergy books was a microcosm of Oughton's dream.

Oughton indicated in her March 6th letter to Marlatt that she was no longer interested in running Ragweed, a point she repeated more emphatically in a later letter to the author: "It is a great relief to me to have started gynergy . . . now I won't have to deal with cookbooks, kidsbooks . . . that just don't interest me at all" (April 3, 1987). There were, however, practical advantages in remaining connected to Ragweed. After years of struggle, the press had finally begun to show a profit: while in 1984, with books sales in the neighbourhood of $100,000, it had barely broken even, by 1987 its sales had increased to $150,000 and its profits to $10,000 (McKeon). Also, there was the matter of Canada Council's block grants to consider. In April 1987, writing to the Canada Council about the titles to appear under the gynergy imprint, Oughton enquired:

> I am wondering whether there is any problem with including these titles under Ragweed's block grant -- both using some of this year's grant for

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[5] Carol's last name is not included in Oughton's letter.

> them, and submitting them toward next year's grant? In the future, if I wanted to make Gynergy more independent, would the titles already published under Ragweed's umbrella, then count as titles toward being eligible for the project grants, or would Gynergy be beginning from scratch? The answers to these questions will help me figure out how exactly to proceed." (Letter to Carol 1)[6]

Unfortunately, no written response to Oughton's questions exists in the archives, although the present use of one block grant for both Ragweed and gynergy titles suggests the answer to the first question. As for the second question, the idea of starting from scratch was hardly attractive to someone who had already struggled through the first few years of Ragweed's life without grant support.

The parenthetical addition to gynergy's name, "daughter of Ragweed Press," appearing on the copyright page of the four 1989 titles, Angela Hryniuk's *Walking Inside Circles*, Ann Decter's *Insister*, Nancy Chater's *Bodies of Knowledge: Fear*, and Patricia Seaman's *Hotel Destiné*, indicates another advantage in remaining associated with Ragweed. Although when the present owners of Ragweed Press/gynergy books took over the publishing house they would work hard to make gynergy known in its own right, that is, not as a "daughter" but an equal partner of Ragweed in both fact and public perception, for Oughton the symbolic capital offered by Ragweed was valuable given the newness of the gynergy imprint. While no other books published under the gynergy imprint at that time or later carry any reference to Ragweed, these titles were in a unique position to benefit from Ragweed's name: not only were Hryniuk, Decter, Chater, and Seaman new authors of works which could be anticipated to have only a limited readership, but their books were put into production soon after Ragweed made national headlines because of the fire which swept the publishing house. Set by an arsonist, the fire of July 1987 which destroyed the press's home, many of its records, and almost all of its inventory (over 18,000 books), also brought the press more nation-wide publicity than it had ever had before. In a letter to Marlene Nourbese Philip apologizing for her slow response to the author's submission of the manuscript which would become *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, Oughton indicated how the fire increased the press's visibility: "And no excuse is really valid, except that we are 5 women trying to catch up after last summer's fire, which also brought a deluge of manuscripts -- almost 400 this year" (Oct. 26, 1988 1). The fire also brought donations and letters of support and encouragement from across the country. Because gynergy was only months old, it was Ragweed's name which made the headlines and circulated within the trade, literary community, and mainstream media.

The symbolic capital offered to gynergy through Ragweed was by no means the sole product of the fire; more so, it was the product of the time and effort Oughton put into establishing connections amongst the Canadian women writers' community through

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[6] Again, no last name is included in Oughton's letter. This Carol, however, clearly worked for the Canada Council.

her participation in conferences and workshops both as a poet and as one of the very few women publishers in Canada who owned and operated her own establishment. It was a great boon for Oughton to have Brossard, Marlatt, and Warland, whom she came to know at these events, be among the first published under her gynergy imprint: their status as well-known lesbian feminists helped her herald gynergy precisely in the direction she wanted -- a lesbian feminist press concentrating on innovative writing. These connections brought her other books as well, notably Elly Danica's *DON'T: A Woman's Word*. "With the publication and subsequent fame of Elly Danica's *DON'T*," Oughton commented a year after the book was published, "the word was out of the closet about gynergy -- in wild variety of pronunciations!" ("a few notes" 1). Oughton met Danica through Brossard at the 1987 Westword Writing workshop where Brossard was the fiction instructor that year and Danica one of her students. After reading Danica's manuscript, Brossard pulled Oughton aside to tell her that it was a manuscript that must be published. Oughton met Danica, heard her read, and agreed with Brossard. Oughton relates, "In secrecy and with urgency, gynergy brought out Elly's book about incest in record time of seven months from receiving the manuscript, in time for its May launch and international sales at the Feminist Book Fair in Montreal. Rights were sold there to England, Ireland, Germany and the United States" ("A Few Notes" 1). *DON'T*, Oughton describes elsewhere, became a publisher's dream: it was a book which she believed in strongly, yet was also one which made the press money (Duerden 39).

The efforts Oughton made in trying to turn Ragweed into a women's press from 1984-87 were also beneficial for gynergy's reputation. After remarking that she loved gynergy's name, Marlatt commented on Gillian Hanscombe and Suniti Namjoshi*'s Flesh and Paper* which was published by Ragweed in 1986 and which she had just reviewed in *(f.)Lip*:

> A fine beginning / launching of a lesbian series. It's wonderful to have these books out in the world, & on that score I thought Gillian and Suniti's preface wonderful to the point. The sense of comradeship in all this, the feeling that there are great things afoot DESPITE the bleak conservatism of this period generally -- feeling connected across the country & connections beginning to build across countries, it's all very exciting. (2)

Books such as Hanscombe and Namjoshi's as well as the ones listed in Oughton's 1986 brochure "Ragweed Publishes Books By Women, for Women, About Women" established a line of continuity between Ragweed and gynergy. In fact, Marlatt and Warland submitted a partial manuscript of *Double Negative* to Ragweed in October of 1986 because they wanted to let Oughton know about it "since [they were] writing it with Ragweed in mind" (Marlatt Oct. 20, 1986 1).

Staying with Ragweed but creating gynergy offered Oughton the best of both worlds: she could capitalize on her previous work with Ragweed and at the same time on the marketing benefits of running a specifically feminist press. As Oughton noted with respect to establishing gynergy: "I found it helps to have an identifiable umbrella or

symbol" (qtd. in Duerden 39). The benefits of having an imprint for women's writing were felt immediately. Although Marlatt and Warland initially thought of *Double Negative* for Ragweed, by November Marlatt informed Oughton that they had also submitted their manuscript to the Women's Press. She explained, "We read from both parts while in Ottawa & Toronto & were pleased to find out that audiences like the work. In fact, Women's Press expressed an interest in seeing it so we've given them pretty much what we gave you so they could also consider it" (Nov. 18, 1986 1). While Marlatt and Warland waited to see who would make the best offer, Oughton established gynergy and contacted the Women's Press about *Double Negative*. She related to Marlatt: "I did talk with the Women's Press about it, and they felt that it probably suited my list better than theirs, if that is agreeable to you" (Mar. 6, 1987 1). The list better suited for Marlatt and Warland's book was gynergy which was the only lesbian feminist press in Canada which was solely literary.

In 1989, only two years after establishing gynergy, Oughton decided to sell the press. She was "exhausted from running the company for 10 years and rebuilding it after [the] fire" (O'Reilly 4). The fire had been a major setback for Oughton and Ragweed: smoke and water damage came to $200,000 while Oughton's insurance policy covered only $60,000. That $200,000 figure, Oughton told *Quill & Quire* readers, did not include labour or overhead costs incurred in cleaning up after the fire or lost sales opportunities that the press could have expected during its peak sales period, P.E.I's summer tourist season (McDougall 71). Yet, media accounts of the fire emphasize only the financial losses the press suffered. A letter from Ragweed employee Lynn Henry to author Liliane Welch personalizes the devastation. Describing the loss of the building in which the press was housed, most of Oughton's "wonderful personal library of Canadiana," and the original art on the walls, Henry reflected: "So where are we now? We have new offices, well-lit and spacious, on the second floor of a downtown building. There is a separate space for Libby, Laurie and myself. But it's not quite the same" (n. pag.). While the fire "'psychologically ruin[ed]' its publisher and [set] in progress a chain of events that would result in Libby's selling the company" (Duerden 39), by the late 80s, other forces were making the press "not quite the same." Oughton acknowledged another reason for selling the press: "I love Ragweed and what it has become. I think I've done a good job. But it's threatening to go from a small company into a small-to-medium size company. I don't have the skills or the interest to be a full time manager/administrator" (O'Reilly 4).

Oughton sought a buyer who had the skills to move the press "gracefully" into its next stage (4). Her requirements for a buyer emphasize that business acumen was not the only quality she looked for in the new owner. When she put the word out that the press was for sale, she specified not only that the company had to stay intact and remain on P.E.I. but that the new owner had to be a woman (4). As these stipulations indicate, Oughton sought to protect both the regionalist and feminist sides of the press. She found her buyer in Louise Fleming who at that time was renting an apartment in a building Oughton owned. Fleming, a committed lesbian feminist who holds an MA in Canadian Literature, had previously worked in management and policy development in both the private and public sectors. Reflecting on her desire to change careers, she notes, "In 1989,

my job was getting in the way of my beliefs and my integrity, so I left my well-paid career in the boy's club and purchased a publishing house" ("The 'Second Mother'" 149). She was, as she announced in *Quill & Quire* soon after purchasing the purchasing the press, "interested in seeing Ragweed expand, particularly under its feminist gynergy imprint" ("Ragweed Finds" 5)

In 1990, Sibyl Frei, the press's present co-owner, moved from a small mining town in Northern Canada to join Fleming on Prince Edward Island. Frei had visited Fleming, an old friend and former lover, soon after Fleming had taken over Ragweed Press/gynergy books. She describes her reason for relocating to the Island: "We fell in love . . . and decided that we wanted to live together. We also decided that we could not live together comfortably in the north, where we would be in the closet" ("Protecting" 155). Together, the current owners have turned the press into a more professional, business-like enterprise. While they share their predecessor's commitment to feminist and lesbian writing, they have transformed gynergy from a lesbian feminist literary press into a lesbian feminist fiction and non-fiction press.

Fleming and Frei: Social and Political Activism

One of the first things Fleming tried to do as the new publisher of Ragweed Press/gynergy books was stop McClelland & Stewart from coming out with its paperback edition of Elly Danica's *DON'T*. Athough new to the business of publishing, she saw Oughton's decision to sell the rights to *DON'T* to a large Canadian publisher while gynergy's trade edition was still doing well in bookstores as a serious mistake. Fleming suspects that McClelland & Stewart might have agreed to back out of its contract with the press on the grounds that it changed hands so soon after the deal was made, but, in the end, she did not pursue the matter further because Danica was keen on the idea of her book coming out with a big publisher. It was, Fleming remarks, much harder to back out of a deal with an author than a publisher (personal interview). Although Danica's book is a success story by small press standards, having sold more than 10,000 copies for gynergy in its first two years (Jobb 18), the story is marred by subsequent events: when McClelland & Stewart's $4.95 mass-market paperback edition hit the stores in 1990, all of gynergy's higher-priced editions, which had just been reprinted in November of 1989, were returned. For the 14,000 readers who purchased the paperback edition of *DON'T* between 1990 and 1991 (Duerden 39), the experience of holding the M&S edition as they were moved by the power of Danica's writing no doubt helped reinforce McClelland & Stewart's self-proclaimed status as "The Canadian Publishers."

Fleming's attempt to stop McClelland & Stewart's publication of *DON'T* represents her determination as the new owner of Ragweed Press/gynergy books to bring "a hard-headed commercial attitude" to publishing (Duerden 37). The press, Fleming recalls, was "unbelievably out of shape" when she purchased it (personal interview). Committed to publishing five poetry manuscripts that Oughton had acquired before leaving the press, Fleming initially spent much of her energy turning Ragweed/gynergy

into "an organized, computerized, stream-lined" business (Duerden 39). In her first year as publisher, she purchased new computer equipment with the help of a Department of Communications grant, giving the press the "most sophisticated desk-top publishing facilities on the Island" ("A PEI/Feminist Press 18), set up new distribution networks in the United States and United Kingdom, and hired a marketing manager to "get more Ragweed books into more bookstores and onto more high school and university courses" (Fleming qtd. in Duerden 39). While Fleming emphasizes the magnitude of the task of putting Ragweed Press/gynergy books on a firm business footing, at the same time she appreciates that small press publishing in the 80s when Oughton ran the press was very different from the 90s when she entered the industry: "The halcyon days were gone" (personal interview).

Certainly, Fleming overstates the idea of the halcyon days of small press publishing when it comes to Ragweed. The only full-time publishing house on P.E.I. never experienced those days in quite the same way as Coach House or NeWest. The realities of publishing without the free labour that comes with large editorial boards and from a place with small local markets and very limited provincial support for publishing forced Oughton, as we saw in the previous section, to adopt the strategy of publishing some commercially oriented titles to support the books she really loved almost from the moment she took over the press in 1980, a strategy which achieved formal expression with the creation of gynergy seven years later. Nonetheless, Fleming's comment reflects a change in ethos at the press, one partly inspired by changes in funding and economic conditions but also by differences in the interests of the press's past and present publishers. Oughton, in spite of her mixed list (and interest in women's writing), shared with Coach House an attitude of suspicion toward money and success; after all, she was a poet interested in formally innovative writing. Although Fleming and Frei also find gynergy the most rewarding part of their publishing house -- both emphasize it was the feminist imprint which drew them to the press and where their primary personal and political investments continue to lie -- they hold a very different attitude to their overall publishing programme and gynergy's financial management. They have continued to publish books for the tourist trade under the Ragweed name (*Finding Anne on Prince Edward Island*, *The Apple a Day Cookbook*, *The Fine Catch Seafood Cookbook*, *Familiar Birds of Prince Edward Island,* and *Wildflowers of Prince Edward Island*); however, they see gynergy as an equal half -- a "sister" not a "daughter" -- of their company. Not only do they formally operate as "Ragweed Press/gynergy books" and aim to publish the same number of titles under each imprint, but they see gynergy as financially self-sustaining rather than as needing the support of their regional press with its tourist trade. At the same time, neither have they adopted the notion of a split list for their lesbian and feminist imprint. Inherent in a split list is the notion of contamination; not only do the current owners reject the idea that gynergy's list is contaminated by those books which make more money but they challenge the attitude which maintains that poor sales equals cultural value. As Fleming remarks, "If I were to say what are some of the books that have made us the most money, I think that those are the books that we've believed in and we've gotten really behind and wanted to do" (personal interview). These books are by no means huge moneymakers and do not sell

themselves without effort on the part of the publisher but fill what the press's owners see as a void in the market.

The void that the current owners seek to fill helps explain why the new business attitude imposed by changes in funding and by the growth of a little press into a middle-sized publisher has caused Ragweed/gynergy far less regret than it has NeWest and far less tension than it did Coach House. While they publish continue to publish literary titles under gynergy, Fleming and Frei are more committed to publishing resource books for the lesbian and feminist movement which can become tools for social and political change. As I will discuss in more detail below, Fleming does not endorse Canada Council policies wholeheartedly -- in fact, far from it, she feels "from Canada Council a complete lack of understanding about what we are doing as a feminist press" (personal interview). However, she does support the present funding ethos which makes publishers more invested in the marketing, distribution, and development of its books because these functions of publishing underline the importance of readership on which social change is dependent. Thus, Fleming and Frei can be interested in how well a book sells without feeling they are compromising their goal of publishing books which would not otherwise be published. Fleming stresses, "I don't care about books that have great reviews and they don't sell. I shouldn't say I don't care but that's not very satisfying to me. In fact it's worse" (personal interview).

Patient No More: The Politics of Breast Cancer by Sharon Batt, a Montreal journalist and founder of Breast Cancer Action Montreal, reflects gynergy's role in making available books that might otherwise not get into print. Batt's manuscript was referred to gynergy from Walter, McFarlane and Ross in Toronto who rejected it because they felt its market was too small. Fleming recalls, "They wanted a more individual story . . . not an investigative feminist analysis of what's happening in breast cancer" (personal interview). A *Maclean's* review of *Patient No More* and Rosalind MacPhee's *Picasso's Woman*, another book on breast cancer published by Douglas &McIntyre in the same year, supports Walter McFarlane and Ross's assessment that the "individual story" is more acceptable to a general audience. Overall, the review is very favourable of Batt's book, calling it "one of the most comprehensive -- and political -- books ever written about breast cancer" (108); however, the reviewer clearly prefers MacPhee's "intensely personal" story of breast cancer to Batt's "hard-hitting exposé" of the breast cancer treatments and research (106). Both *Patient No More* and *Picasso's Woman* represent what the *Maclean's* reviewer calls the recent trend of breast cancer narratives which take "on an angry tone as breast cancer climbs to epidemic proportions" (106). But what makes MacPhee's book more palatable for the reviewer is that the author "keeps her sense of humour" (106). S/he sums up, "In *Picasso's Woman*, breast cancer is an adventure" (107). While MacPhee "weaves up-to-date medical information into her narrative," for the reviewer, "the real achievement of [her] book is its startlingly frank and sensitive description of what it is like to lose a breast, from the sadness and nausea she felt when she forced herself to look at her mastectomy scar, to ambivalence, grief and, finally, grudging acceptance" (106). In contrast, while the reviewer likes that Batt uses "her own personal story as a counterpoint" to her feminist critique of the breast cancer industry and

feels that her "sense of urgency about the issues generally enlivens her material," s/he criticizes *Patient No More* for "occasionally suffer[ing] from an overdose of detail" (108).

Although Batt had an initial manuscript when she signed her contract with the press, gynergy worked closely with her for more than three years to make the book more accessible and to add just what the *Maclean's* reviewer criticized it for -- "an overdose of detail." In spite of winning the 1995 Laura Jamieson Award for best feminist non-fiction book and having strong initial sales -- 4,000 copies in the first three months -- *Patient No More*, Fleming remarks, did not sell as well as it should have: "It has not reached its market and there's a point at which you know it won't" (personal interview). While disappointed that they could not make a bigger success of Batt's book, Fleming and Frei are extremely proud of having produced a book which they see as a crucial resource for women interested in the present state of breast cancer research and treatment and women who are or want to become activists on breast cancer issues.

gynergy's list is a combination of what crosses the publisher's desk and what the press feels it would like to see in the marketplace. It is not usual for gynergy to initiate titles or spend an extraordinary amount of time and money on book development. Given the length of time that many of gynergy's projects are in development and production, the owners choose projects which will sustain their interest over a long-term. Thus, the decision of what to publish is influenced by their daily realities as lesbian feminists living in a small eastern province. Although gynergy was the first Canadian publisher to publish a book of lesbian erotica, *By Word of Mouth: Lesbians Write the Erotic* (1989), Fleming and Frei expressly did not want to become "erotica publishers." Press Gang in Vancouver, Fleming notes, is on the edge of lesbian sex writing, but its location in a big city where there are sex clubs and where discussions of S&M circulate helps foster its interest in this area. Fleming emphasizes, "You have to live in a community, I think, to have some of the influence in your publishing programme" (personal interview). gynergy has focussed on areas such as mothering and women and health. Both *Lesbian Parenting: Living with Pride and Prejudice* edited by Katherine Arnup and *Mothering Teens: Understanding the Adolescent* edited by Miriam Kaufman were initiated in-house because of Fleming and Frei's own status as lesbian parents who co-parent a daughter about to reach her teens. As well, the issue of health care must seem rather more immediately relevant than S&M to two women living in a province with too few doctors and even fewer medical specialists.

The funding cuts of 1995 which were the catalyst to Coach House's closure and NeWest's temporary residence at the University of Alberta Press also hit Ragweed/gynergy hard. In its 1996 application for Canada Council's block program, the press reported a loss of $50,000 in grants over the previous year. Two other occurrences in the same year compounded the effect that the reduction in grant money had on the press. The cost of paper which had been steady for 15 years went up. Frei notes that while it was certainly time for an increase, the timing was unfortunate. Also, the press's U.S. distributer, Inland Books, a Connecticut-based wholesaler and distributer of small press titles, with which the press had signed an exclusive distribution and representation contract

in 1992, filed for bankruptcy protection.[7] As Scott Anderson announced in *Quill & Quire*, "The move throws into doubt Inland's ability to pay more than $100,000 it owes to 28 Canadian publishers." Publishers' options were limited: while they questioned Inland's ability to continue distributing their books well, if they sought another distributor, they would forfeit their chance of seeing the money they were owed (Anderson 9). Ragweed/gynergy decided to stick it out, and eventually a new company bought Inland. But as Frei describes, "They made all kinds of promises to us which were never realized" (personal interview). While the press has recently moved to UTP for both its Canadian and United States distribution, it lost market shares from 1995 to 1998 which thus far it has been unable to recover. The loss of these market shares is particularly significant for gynergy. In Anita Elash's *Quill & Quire* article "The Ellen Effect," Fleming notes: "About 85% of sales of gynergy's lesbian mysteries and 75% of non-fiction titles are sold in the United States and the United Kingdom" (38). Similarly, Barbara Kuhne, managing editor of Press Gang and Brian Lam, publisher of Arsenal Pulp, stress the importance of U.S. markets for their Vancouver-based gay and lesbian publishing houses: Kuhne remarks that Press Gang does "print runs that typically range from 6,000 to 8,000 copies, 75% of which are sold in the United States" and Lam states more generally that "[t]he U.S. market has become so important Arsenal now tailors its gay titles for American readers" (qtd. in Elash 37). Elash outlines that the United States's large readership for gay and lesbian books is due not only to a much larger gay and lesbian audience but to better distribution channels and avenues for promotion such as the *Lambada Book Report* and *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Journal*. In Canada, by comparison, "there are only about half a dozen gay and lesbian bookstores" and "no specialized Canadian review journals for gay and lesbian titles" (Elash 37).

Besides the rise in paper costs and the Inland fiasco, other phenomena have hurt gynergy's sales. One is the influx of gay and lesbian titles produced by mainstream publishers. Frei laments that presses such as gynergy are now being crowded out of the very market they have been instrumental in developing. She remarks, "Our sales have gone down in the lesbian niche because there is only so much room" (personal interview). With their better resources, larger publishers not only lure small presses' better-selling authors away but promote and market their books more successfully. Both Frei and Fleming firmly believe that larger publishers have no real commitment to lesbian writing and thus will eventually get bored and move onto something else. Their belief is all too readily confirmed by Jack David of ECW Press who remarked that his press's recent publication of two unauthorized biographies of singers k.d. lang and Melissa Etheridge did not derive from commitment to the category. Instead, he described these books as "'the flavour of the month and then it becomes another genre'" (qtd. in Elash 38). In the meantime, gynergy and other gay and lesbian publishing houses are forced to try to make ends meet. As Frei reflects, "We'll be here to continue, but it's a rocky road nonetheless" (personal interview). The closure of many independent bookstores and the concentration of book

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[7] The rise of paper costs and the Inland Book fiasco were also part of the financial crisis NeWest experienced in 1995.

distribution in chainstores has made the road even rockier for gynergy. The press has found it difficult to get its books in the chains, even in the case of a widely recognized author such as Elly Danica who published *Beyond Don't* with the press in 1995. While the press typically offers its authors what it calls token advances in the 250 to 500 dollar range, it gave Danica a much larger advance to help give her the time to write *Beyond Don't*. It also hired a freelance editor to work closely with her throughout the writing of her second book. Obviously, the press anticipated the book's financial success. However, the press told the Canada Council:

> The chains became one chain which so far has shown little interest in our books. For example, Chapters ordered a total of 367 copies of *Beyond Don't: Dreaming Past the Dark*, despite the fact that Elly Danica is a very well-known author with a devoted audience and whose first book sold over 20,000 copies. We provided a very strong promotional plan to Chapters, including confirmed national media. We expected and needed four times the national order they placed. (Application to the Canada Council, Block Grant Program, Section III, page 4).

Ragweed titles have also not done well in the chain and in 1995 faced their own unique problem, a downturn in the local tourist market and a depressed Atlantic economy. All factors combined, in 1996 Ragweed Press/gynergy books reported an $80,000 drop in sales from the previous year.

The decrease in sales combined with the cutbacks in grants forced the press into survival mode; in 1996 Fleming and Frei began to cut the number of books they published and in 1997 they cut its staff. Currently, the press publishes approximately seven titles annually, just over half the titles it averaged pre-1996, and employs four women including its owners, again just over half the number it once had. Along with the staffing reductions, the make-up of its staff has altered significantly. Frei comments, "There is only clerical staff now, no middle positions" (personal interview). The middle positions were those specialized to the publishing industry, including a marketing manager, a design and production person, and an editor. Staffing changes have necessitated a revision of Fleming and Frei's roles at the press and they have undertaken many of the tasks formerly done by its employees. Fleming continues to be the publisher, responsible for the overall management of the press, but now oversees marketing and does some of the editorial work. As the production manager, Frei still manages the editing, design, production, and printing schedules but, increasingly, as budgets have tightened for hiring freelancers, does more of the actual editing.

The loss of the middle positions has also meant a revision of the editorial decision-making process. Although the press has always relied and continues to rely heavily on outside readers (librarians, booksellers, college and university professors, and individual writers and editors), especially for its children's books and non-fiction, before 1997 all permanent employees were involved in determining its publishing programme. With respect to unsolicited manuscripts, the press's senior editor, Lynn Henry, would go

through the slush pile to determine the maybe's and circulate those manuscripts to the rest of the staff who would fill out reader's reports and then attend editorial meetings to work out which books the press would publish. This process happened about four times a year. But, as Frei notes, in a really good year unsolicited manuscripts may make up only three titles. Because projects initiated in-house are a crucial part of the press's list, at those editorial meetings, staff would also generate ideas about projects they wished to publish and possible authors or collecting editors for those projects. In 1995, to come up with new ideas, the press invited 40 feminist activists from the community to attend a meeting to celebrate feminist publishing and activism on Prince Edward Island and to brainstorm about books they wanted to see available in a trade edition. One forthcoming title which came out of that meeting is *Women and the Millennium*. Another project, also forthcoming, which received positive feedback, is a feminist analysis of the current debate on False Memory Syndrome (FMS), *Abuse and Memory* edited by Margo Rivera. Although this project had already been discussed in house, the meeting emphasized that feminist responses to FMS are diverse. The book, according to Frei, reflects that diversity in that it is a complex look at the issue and not an immediate dismissal of the FMS position. While Frei feels that the 1995 meeting was very successful and had hoped to hold similar meetings in subsequent years, thus far the sheer energy it has taken to survive has prevented the publishers from doing so.

Since 1997, Fleming and Frei have determined the press's publishing programme alone. Beyond the immediate fact that editorial decisions now reflect the interests of two rather than a larger group of women which ranged from six to eight, this change has other implications. Even though a division always existed at the press between the bosses who are financially responsible for it and its employees, Fleming and Frei worked hard to have the structure as fair as it could be. Involving employees in making editorial decisions was one way to moderate a top down management model, as was paying them above industry standards and having them included in the perks of the business such as attending international bookfairs. Fleming reflects, "You can't be a feminist publisher and operate your business in a really hierarchical way. At least we couldn't" (personal interview). As Catherine Macleod notes in her memoir of working for the Women's Press, during the founding meeting of the Toronto publishing house the members closely tied its decision to operate collectively to its politics of undermining hierarchical models of business and patriarchal values (32). While gynergy never operated on a collective principle in the same way as the Women's Press, an even more entrenched hierarchy now exists at the press. Because the change in gynergy's editorial structure has been so recent, it is difficult to assess if and how it will impact the perception of the press among its close network of authors, feminist bookstores, and readers.

A less stable economic base has meant that gynergy has had to consider if the press can afford to publish a manuscript, which does not mean, Fleming stresses, that a manuscript has to sell 2,000 to be accepted, but that ultimately it needs be a moneymaker (personal interview). The pressure to look more closely at the bottom line began in the mid-90s when the entire staff was still involved making editorial decisions: while in the early 90s editorial decisions were made based on information the staff had at hand and a

liking for a manuscript, so that most decisions were made in one or two meetings, later it also meant taking the time to assess the manuscripts the staff liked in terms of their market potential, the editorial time needed to get them into shape, and their estimated production costs. In reaction to market considerations, gynergy has dropped straight feminist fiction from its list in spite of personal commitments to the genre. Fleming comments: "We have not sold very well into that market and it's not that we haven't tried to. . . . We didn't say we really love feminist fiction so we're going to keep on publishing it. We said we can't sell it so we're not publishing it" (personal interview). She cites factors such as not being centrally located and the provincialism of the country as contributing to the problems the press had in selling these titles.

Like NeWest, gynergy has learned to focus on what it does well. For gynergy this has meant developing its lesbian fiction and lesbian and feminist non-fiction niches. Within the lesbian fiction niche, one area that the press has moved into is mysteries. Barbara Wilson writes in "The Outside Edge: Lesbian Mysteries" that in the 1990s "[l]esbian mysteries have become a recognized genre, and one of the most popular ones" (218): "For lesbian writers and readers, the appeal of novels of investigation . . . seem clear. Not only have most of us been silenced as women, but as lesbians another layer of silence surrounds our lives. The lesbian investigator brings this silence into her work" (222). Thus when Jackie Manthorne, who had already published two books of short stories with gynergy, mentioned that she was interested in writing a mystery, Fleming and Frei encouraged her to think of doing a series. Manthorne has published five "Harriet Hubbley" mysteries with gynergy of which one, *Final Take*, was nominated for a Lambda Literary Award.

The niches for which the press publishes are successful in terms of U.S. sales; thus Fleming remarks that she "avoids referring to Canada in titles and promotional material so as not to scare off potential U.S. buyers" ("The Ellen Effect" 38). The ties of these titles to markets in the United States has also informed the content of gynergy's books; for example, because the press anticipated success in the States with Jackie Manthorne's lesbian mysteries, it asked Manthorne to consider US settings for several of the books in the series and offered the Michigan Women's Music Festival as a possibility. Although Manthorne liked the suggestion she did not feel able to do so because she had never been to the festival (Letter to Louise and Lynn 1). She did set the fourth book, *Final Take*, at the International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in San Francisco. In the case of *Skinny Dipping* (1996), a book of poetry by lesbian author Marian Frances White, Frei asked the freelance editor on the project to "work with Marian to find a few more poems with lesbian content" (Letter to Rhea Tregobov 1).

A crucial part of determining whether or not gynergy can afford to publish a book is its eligibility under Canada Council guidelines. Oughton, too, faced this problem with respect to four books she published under gynergy in 1989: Angela Hryniuk's *Walking Inside Circles*, Ann Decter's *Insister*, Nancy Chater's *Bodies of Knowledge: Fear*, and Patricia Seaman's *Hotel Destiné*. She met Hryniuk, Decter, Chater, and Seaman at West Word 3 women writers' workshop and invited them to submit their completed manuscripts for a chapbook series devoted to the works of young women writers which she was hoping to begin. The success of Brossard's *Sous la langue / Under Tongue* no

doubt inspired her to consider more chapbooks. As well, the form appealed to Oughton for innovative new writers precisely because a chapbook is not a "book." When the manuscripts actually began to arrive, Oughton hesitated and wrote to Hryniuk:

> I haven't yet launched a gynergy chapbook list, and have many conflicting thoughts about that. I personally like chapbooks, but given the cultural systems in Canada, they run into many problems. I can not use Canada Council grants to publish them because they are not "legitimate" books, and you as a writer can not go on reading tours, etc, with CC money because a book of less than 48 pages does not 'qualify' the writer as writer. (1)

Though the books were published as a group and maintain a chapbook feel to some degree, they were published according to the Canada Council definition of a book which especially with respect to Hryniuk's and Seaman's manuscript meant some creativity in meeting the 48 page minimum requirement.

The current owners of gynergy face a different problem with Canada Council's definition of a legitimate book. A recent change to Canada Council's eligibility requirements challenges a significant portion of their list, its non-fiction and fiction anthologies. Due to its lesbian and feminist mandate the press has tried not to do exclusively Canadian-focussed books. From *Tide Lines: Stories of Change by Lesbians* (1991), *Imprinting Our Image: An International Anthology by Women with Disabilities* (1992), to *To Sappho, My Sister: Lesbian Sisters Write About Their Lives*(1995), the press has sought instead to portray the interests of and reach a global community of lesbians and feminists. Before 1995, the Council considered these titles within its mandate as long as they had a Canadian collecting editor; however, since then, to be eligible, a title must contain at least 50 percent Canadian-authored creative content. Thus, in 1996, the Council rejected one of gynergy's titles, *Across Borders: Women with Disabilities Working Together*, which included articles by women from a number of counties including Canada, El Salvador, Trinidad, Zimbabwe, Yemen, and the United States. While the anthology was edited by a Canadian, Diane Driedger, a well-known rights activist for disabled women, it included, according to the Council, only 48% Canadian content. Frei and Fleming appealed the decision which resulted in a long and complicated process involving spreadsheets of the word count of individual contributions and a debate over of the authorship of interview transcriptions. (The Canada Council considered the interviewee's nationality while the press the interviewer's.) Although gynergy eventually won the appeal and was allowed to include *Across Borders* as an eligible title for its 1998 Block Grant, it did not win on the grounds it had hoped, that is, that the book be considered "Canadian"; it won because, as Gordon Platt, the head of the Writing and Publishing Section of the Council, apprised Fleming and Frei, "you do not seem to have been aware that the book did not qualify when you decided to publish it and the loss of grant revenue causes some financial difficultly for Ragweed" (1). "In the future, however," Platt stressed, "we will apply this 50% rule" (1). Insistence on the rule came as much from

the Writers' Union of Canada as the Council. Established in 1973 to protect the rights of published authors, the Writers' Union, Platt informed gynergy, "have asked us to be diligent in applying this rule and would like to be involved in any negotiations or discussions about changing it" (Platt 2).

While Fleming and Frei remain commited to projects which reflect an international community of women, Frei admits that "with the change in block grant, we must absolutely have 50% Canadian content because we can't afford to do it without Canada Council money" (personal interview). Both Oughton's experience with her proposed chapbook series and Fleming and Frei's continued commitment to non-Canadian-centred anthologies suggest how presses can find ways to negotiate their mandates within funding guidelines, although it is equally clear that funding guidelines shape books. The forthcoming *Women and the Millennium*, for example, has turned into a very different project from the one planned originally. As Frei notes, "We rejected pieces we wanted because [of the] 50% rule" (personal interview). It is ironic that funding bodies, such as the Canada Council, which have put pressure on presses to become more self-sufficient financially, end up undermining their successes through policies such as the Canadian content rule. gynergy's niches for sales and subsidiary rights, as I outlined above, are not Canadian specific; while the inclusion of international voices may fit into political aims of the press, there are financial considerations attendant to those inclusions which may not be adequately met due to the 50% Canadian content requirement, particularly when rigidly defined by the author's nationality.

gynergy's dispute with Canada Council over *Across Borders* underscores the competing cultural agendas of national organizations such as the Writers' Union and Canada Council and a lesbian feminist press. Both the Union's and the Council's notion of cultural excellence is rooted in a notion of Canadian nationalism which, while it has become more pluralistic, remains firmly grounded in geographic location. gynergy's definition of cultural excellence derives from a desire to transform women's social, cultural, and political positions on local, national, and global levels. While gynergy's sense of community suggests that Canadian lesbians and feminists have more in common with lesbians and feminists "across borders" than with other Canadians, the aims of the Council and gynergy are not naturally mutually exclusive. It is only within present nation-state ideology which developed from a long history of self-protectionism that they conflict. Texts such as *Across Borders* could be regarded as nationalistic in that they examine Canadian society by relating the concerns of Canadian women to a global community. More radically, they could be valued and supported apart from any notion of nationalism and instead for their work in gender and sexual politics. Either alternative, however, would require a profound reconception of Canadian nationhood.

That Frei and Fleming struggle with the Canada Council over gynergy's titles and not Ragweed's suggests a more readily accepted coherence between the aims of regionalism and nationalism. Although regionalism's concept of location is based in a smaller geographical unit than nationalism's, it nonetheless is based in geography. At least in terms of perceived political boundaries, gynergy's mandate is more closely aligned with the avant-gardist one of Coach House. However, at least in its earlier years, because of its

printing operation, Coach House had the economic capital to forbear Canada Council's nationalistic mandate. As Coleman told Derryll White in 1973, he did not advocate the Council's policy to support only Canadian-authored titles. But, as his playful mimicry of the Council, "publish yer Amurricans on your own bread, baby," suggests, he could distance himself from Council requirements and continue doing what he wanted to do, that is, publish Americans.[8] When every title is needed to obtain an adequate block grant to continue existing, gynergy cannot afford to be amused by or to disregard Council policies.

Frei believes that the battle with the Canada Council over the eligibility of *Across Borders* has hurt the press's relationship with the Canada Council: "We feel [it has] really retaliated now for having finally agreed after considerable browbeating to allow our appeal" (personal interview). She sees the Council's rejection of a more recent gynergy title, *Mothering Teens: Understanding the Adolescent Years*, as an example of the Council striking back at gynergy for "nickelling and diming" it to the bitter end of a rather nasty appeal (personal interview). The Council refused to accept this book because it deemed it a "self-help" manual, a genre its grant program for publishers has never supported. The Canada Council's list of ineligible titles -- which includes mass-market paperbacks distributed through mass-market channels, calendars, agendas, and almanacs, academic, scholarly or educational books, cookbooks, and guidebooks, as well as instructional, personal growth or self-help books and manuals -- suggests that financial and cultural reasons, sometimes both, underlie certain exclusions. Stunned by the Council's refusal to consider *Mothering Teens* as part of its 1998 block grant award, Fleming and Frei appealed the decision and obtained letters from a bookseller and psychology professor specializing in self-help books to support that their book on mothering did not fall under this genre. Thus far, the Council has not revoked its decision.

There are a number of ways to read the Council's decision: a retaliatory gesture as Frei believes; a creative strategy for reducing grant support as the Council is forced to deal with its own cutbacks; or, perhaps most disturbing of all, an instance of the contemporary backlash against feminism, grounded in this case in a denigration of women's issues as too "personal" and thus not important politically or culturally. In her 1978 "Motherhood: The Contemporary Emergency and the Quantum Leap," Adrienne Rich warned that "[m]otherhood, the family, are still too often relegated to the realm of the 'private and personal'" (262) and encouraged women to make the personal political. "One of the most powerful social and political catalysts of the past decade," she noted, "has been the speaking of women with other women, the telling of our secrets, the comparing of wounds and the sharing words" (260). *Mothering Teens*, in which twenty-two professionals in the field of child-care discuss topics from violence, sexuality and sexual orientation, spirituality, adolescent development, to body image, seeks to reform from a feminist perspective attitudes to parenting. But this reformation is, as Rich reminds us, tied to larger societal change. The full implications of the Council's decision can only be read within the its description of eligible non-fiction titles: "creative or literary non-fiction (including works of Canadian history and biography; essays on ideas, society, politics,

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[8] See Chapter One, pp. 58-59.

cultural and the arts; and travel writing) that is accessible to the general public and makes a significant contribution to the development of literature, to the arts, or the enjoyment of writing by Canadians" (Program Information). Self-help becomes an all too convenient category to dismiss books that the Canada Council feels do not make a "significant contribution" to "the enjoyment of writing by Canadians." That self-help books are typically gendered as female ties them too easily to "women's" issues such as parenting. Compared to the exclusion of *Across Borders* due to the 50% Canadian content rule, the rejection of *Mothering Teens* as self-help is an even greater threat to gynergy and its choice of future titles precisely because it is nebulous.

Conclusion

Why gynergy remains the least well-known feminist press in Canada is a complicated question, one which raises a number of conceptual problems, not the least of which is assessing for *whom* the press is invisible. The specific community I wish to address here in closing is the academic community of feminists for whom Fleming expresses a great deal of frustration, stemming largely from the importance of the academic market for trade publishers in Canada. Fleming sees a large separation between the front-line feminist activists who struggle under adverse conditions to produce the resources necessary for the lesbian and feminist movements and the academic women who have the power to disseminate and consecrate those resources. Academic feminists, she insists, are "really removed from the struggles we are having and yet feminist literature predated feminist and women's studies" (personal interview). While Fleming generalizes on behalf of Canadian feminist publishers, gynergy especially has struggled for recognition in academic circles and with getting books onto course lists. Certainly, gynergy is much newer than either Press Gang or the Women's Press, but this fact in itself does not account for its invisibility: Sister Vision, for instance, established in 1986, has more attained more symbolic capital than gynergy. Perhaps the primary reason for gynergy's under-recognition is that its cultural politics have not been as closely aligned as those of the other Canadian feminist presses with the hot topics of academic feminism in the past decade -- race or queer theory. In addition, Fleming admits, writers worry about what a little press on P.E.I., which lies outside of the major markets for feminist and lesbian books, can do for them. While Oughton managed to draw several big name lesbian feminist writers to the press -- Brossard, Marlatt, and Warland -- the newness of the imprint impeded the full impact of publishing these authors on the reputation of "gynergy." Similar to Michael Coren who subsumed gynergy under the "muscular Ragweed," Frank Davey has recently called "Ragweed" a feminist publishing house (86). As this chapter has suggested, regional location has compounded, materially and symbolically, the problems of gynergy's operation as a lesbian feminist publisher.

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CONCLUSION

Although his model of the field of cultural production is based on a fundamental antagonism between large-scale commercial producers who minimize financial risk by publishing for an identifiable demand and restricted cultural producers who embrace the risks inherent in producing for small or non-existent markets, Bourdieu insists that "[o]ne should beware of seeing anything more than a limiting parameter construction in the opposition between the two modes of production of symbolic goods, which can only be defined in terms of their relations with each other" (*Field* 127). Instead, producers who comprise a single universe such as contemporary publishing in English-Canada occupy a series of intermediary positions between the two poles in their most extreme, and unattainable, forms -- "total and cynical subordination to demand" and "absolute independence from the market and its exigencies" (*Rules* 141-42). Thus, while falling at the restricted end of what Bourdieu posits as a continuum, the three presses in this study maintain distinct positions according to the degree to which they make economic disavowal their *modi operandi*: Coach House which most oriented its strategies toward the values of disinterestedness, and thus fell closest to, without ever having achieved, a complete repudiation of market forces; NeWest which has maintained a compromise position between making enough money to survive, expressed earliest in George Melnyk's decision to publish only those books which obtained grant support and more recently in the editorial board's decision to publish some books with a short-term production cycle, and refusing to consider a book's market appeal; and gynergy which after a brief history under Libby Oughton of championing economic disavowal has most fully accepted profit motive as a principle of book acquisition and therefore is situated closest to, but still distant from, the commercial pole. As we saw in the case studies, their positions in the field cannot be fully explained by referring to what the individuals who run them say they hope to accomplish, or, conversely, by ignoring what they say, but by locating their desires and aims within the material conditions of their operation, particularly the amount of economic capital to which they have had access.

In "On Bourdieu's Rules," William Paulson notes that it is by positing the field of cultural production as a continuum -- a universe of middle positions between the two idealized poles of pure commercialism and non-commercialism -- that Bourdieu performs his project of demystification. "The question," he emphasizes, "of the [producer's] exemplary integrity or menaced subjection [is] replaced by a more multiple and nuanced look at the concrete play of constraint and manoeuvre in the spaces where artistic and intellectual work is carried out" (411). Without disagreeing with Paulson that this more nuanced look is where the value of a Bourdieuian approach lies, I would argue that he is only partially correct in attributing to Bourdieu an interest in mapping middle positions. In spite of his insistence throughout *The Field of Cultural Production* and *The Rules of Art* on the range of positions of cultural producers, Bourdieu bases his theory on empirical work done on French producers who occupy the most extreme positions in the field at a given moment. Specifically in terms of the field of restricted production, Bourdieu develops this theory through the concrete cases of *avant-garde* publishers (Éditions de

Minuit, for example). Thus, it is not surprising that his theory has more heuristic value for Coach House than the other presses in this study. Coach House conforms, as I suggested in Chapter One, in very precise ways to his description of how an avant-garde producer engaged in consecration -- and the economic profits this entails -- grows old, with all the contradictions and internal anxieties that this imposes.

As useful as Bourdieu's model has been for documenting a history of Coach House which has been ignored in the desire to uphold the press as an idealized projection of the purely non-commercial, his virtual equation of the avant-garde position with the field of restricted production has some disturbing implications for how we read the value of producers such as NeWest and gynergy whose cultural politics can only be partially explained in terms of their investments in disinterest. While these presses use their resistance to publishing books with pre-established forms for a pre-existing demand in order to justify the need for their existence both internally amongst their members as well as externally in the eyes of audiences and government funding institutions, they have at the same time sought to make an impact beyond their immediate circles. This desire for diffusion of their politics -- in the case of NeWest to bring the West out of its subordinate position in relation to nation-state ideology for audiences inside and outside of its region, and in the case of gynergy to revise mainstream attitudes to feminists and lesbians -- competes directly with the anti-economic economy of pure art. Here, making money from their books is a sign that they are reaching audiences and fulfilling their mandates -- in other words, a sign of health not commercialism. Della McCreary, co-publisher of Press Gang, reflects this politics of *interest* explicitly when she proclaims on the press's website that her dream is "to ultimately transform Press Gang into a *mass market* feminist publishing house, despite the apparent contradiction in terms" (n. pag). Certainly, Bourdieu's point is to show how no producer is disinterested; nonetheless, his theory, relying on the avant-garde, insists that interest is hidden or denied and offers little insight on how to deal with such bold proclamations by *cultural* producers. Further, there is a value system implied in Bourdieu's continuum where the closer one is positioned to the non-commercial, that is the autonomous, end the more radical ones intervention in culture and society. As Paulson notes, in *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu upholds creative and scholarly autonomy "as a rule for the preservation of intellectual integrity" (411) -- an endorsement already evident in his earlier work. My qualification here of Bourdieu's theory parallels one of the major criticisms of his work: that in emphasizing class it leaves untheorized other subjectivities based in race, gender, ethnicity, and region (Moi, "Appropriating Bourdieu," LiPuma, Calhoun). Placing economic disavowal "at the very heart of the field, as the principle governing its functioning and transformation" (Bourdieu, *Field* 79), functions as a form of symbolic violence to cultural producers who have goals other than avant-gardism and which disinterest cannot fully describe.

The other main reservation about Bourdieu has concerned his so-called deterministic world view. Recently, Toril Moi ("Challenge") and John Guillory have addressed this issue, claiming that while agents in Bourdieu's work tend to reproduce structures of domination -- "to 'love [their] fate,'" as Moi writes, "so as to make choices which further strengthen the social patterns that conditioned them in the first place" (502)

-- there is nothing in Bourdieu's work which prohibits the possibility for change. Because fields are conceived of as sites of never-ending struggles, new positions are always possible though always influenced by the positions already in place. The emergence and growth of the three presses I have examined confirm the possibility of establishing new forms of cultural activism, although within an already prescribed spaced. Both Moi and Guillory argue convincingly that the American critic's fetish for agency in a period in which, as Guillory says, "it has become increasingly important to justify academic practice by asserting it as the vehicle of political transformation" (36) has rendered Bourdieu's approach, which mediates between voluntarism and determinism, unpalatable. Yet, it is this mediation which has been especially valuable for an area of study which, as I argued in the Introduction, has been invested with too much freedom of choice. Certainly, critics such as Frank Davey and Lynette Hunter have emphasized that contemporary English-Canadian publishing, including small press publishing, is largely a middle-class phenomenon (Davey 19; Hunter 51). While they articulate what we "know" to be true, the case histories of individual presses help to account more fully for the difficulties of altering patterns of production. From their origins, Coach House, NeWest, and gynergy have been oriented toward well-read audiences, and their tendency to publish who they know and what their habitus suggests is good writing perpetuates their leanings toward middle-class authors and readers.

In spite of my reservations about the importance Bourdieu places on economic disavowal, his theory with its insistence on the concrete case has been a useful tool for bringing a materialist analysis to the study of the Canadian small press movement. Much work remains to be done on small presses, including the three I have examined here -- not only as we rethink the approaches we use to assess the impact they have on what we read and critique but also as more of their materials are archived and opened to the public. Nonetheless, this study begins to offer a greater understanding of what small presses do and why they do what they do.

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